Legislative Research Commission

Assistance to Low-achieving Schools and Districts: Strengths, Limitations, and Continuing Challenges

Research Report No. 378

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Legislative Research Commission
Frankfort, Kentucky
lrc.ky.gov

Accepted December 7, 2010, by the
Education Assessment and Accountability Review Subcommittee

Paid for with state funds. Available in alternate form by request.

Foreword

In December 2009, the Education Assessment and Accountability Review Subcommittee approved a research agenda for the Office of Education Accountability that included *Assistance to Low-achieving Schools and Districts: Strengths, Limitations, and Continuing Challenges*. The purpose of the report is to provide the General Assembly with a review of performance trends for low-achieving schools, an analysis of assistance effects, and an analysis of school needs that might be met with future assistance.

Office of Education Accountability staff would like to thank the many individuals who assisted with this report. Kentucky Department of Education staff provided program data and historical background for program implementation. Highly skilled educators, superintendents, principals, and teachers helped identify strengths and limitations of assistance as relevant to the priority needs of low-achieving schools.

Robert Sherman
Director

Legislative Research Commission
Frankfort, Kentucky
December 2010

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Summary

This report analyzes trends in the performance of low-achieving schools and districts and the effects of state and federal efforts to assist them. It identifies strengths as well as limitations of existing assistance efforts—including those currently required for the state's persistently low-achieving schools—and makes recommendations that might be applied to consideration of future funding.

Findings provide reason for optimism as well as caution. While low-achieving schools are performing at substantially higher levels than were low-achieving schools a decade ago, they still lag far behind state averages. State assistance has been associated with dramatic gains in many schools but appears to have had modest or no effects in many of the state's lowest-achieving schools. Kentucky data reflect national data in the disproportionate number of low-achieving schools with high percentages of students living in poverty and high percentages of minority students. In Kentucky and nationwide, a disproportionate number of low-achieving schools are located in urban areas.

Existing forms of assistance appear to have been most effective when they have led to improvements in school leadership and culture, especially in the collective commitment and ability of staff to pursue high standards in teaching and learning. The Highly Skilled Educator program, which has been the cornerstone of state assistance, has been successful when it has helped principals and school staff to identify and work toward common goals that were lacking in the past. There is less evidence that school improvement grants or scholastic audits alone spur these types of changes. On average, state assistance appears to have been more effective at the elementary level than at the middle or high school levels.

Existing forms of assistance have been less successful in schools facing deep, systemic challenges. Two key challenges face many of the state's lowest-achieving schools; both are greatest at the high school level. The first is the attraction and retention of teachers and leaders with the skills necessary to be successful with the school's students. This challenge is especially great in Jefferson County and other urban districts. Low-achieving schools are not first choice for most teacher applicants. Given the option, many teachers transfer to higher-achieving schools. Rural schools can also face difficulties attracting and retaining teachers, especially for hard-to-fill subjects such as mathematics. The second challenge is lack of community support for changes that may be necessary to help students meet high academic expectations. School leaders can face difficulty holding teachers and students accountable for high expectations in the absence of full support from district administrators and local school boards.

Chronic low school performance requires sustained attention from state and local leaders. In recent years, the Kentucky Department of Education has had primary statutory responsibility for identifying and assisting low-achieving schools. However, many of the challenges facing low-achieving schools can be met successfully only through coordinated action by state and local leaders, including local school boards. Local leaders play a crucial role in setting, supporting, and maintaining expectations of high performance for school staff and students. Many district administrators and local school board members may not be sufficiently prepared to assist in the

improvement of low-achieving schools. However, both state and federal assistance efforts have been focused primarily at the school level.

In the future, the General Assembly might weigh the benefits of assistance similar to what has been provided in the past against alternative options designed to address key challenges identified in this report. Recent changes proposed by the Kentucky Department of Education (KDE) intensify a form of assistance that is similar to what has been provided in the past in that it places KDE consultants in low-achieving schools. While this form of assistance can be effective in some schools, it does little to address systemic challenges faced by many low-achieving schools. Alternative options might include strategies to attract and retain teachers in hard-to-staff schools, to develop pipelines of specially qualified teachers and leaders for low-achieving schools, and to support district administrators and local school boards in efforts to monitor and improve schools.

The report makes the following recommendations:

Recommendation 3.1
The Kentucky Department of Education should consider determining a mobility rate methodology and collect the data necessary to calculate student mobility rates for all schools and districts. These measures should be incorporated into school and district report cards.

Recommendation 3.2
The General Assembly should consider continuing to permit the commissioner of education, through budget language, to use funds appropriated for Commonwealth School Improvement Grants to provide support to schools identified for assistance.

Recommendation 3.3
The General Assembly should consider linking future funding for assistance to low-achieving schools and districts with requirements for program development and implementation that allow for rigorous evaluation using multiple measures and, if possible, random assignment. Program evaluation should include both quantitative and qualitative measures.

Recommendation 3.4
The General Assembly should consider amending KRS 160.290 to expand the duties of local school boards to include continuous monitoring of and support for district efforts to improve student learning.

Recommendation 3.5
In the redesign of Kentucky's assessment and accountability system, the Kentucky Department of Education, in consultation with relevant groups, should consider modifications to the scholastic audits that have been used in the past to monitor practices in districts and schools. Revised audits should reflect best practices in the areas of leadership, culture, and staffing. Audits should also reflect the important role of school boards, school

and district leadership, and school councils in monitoring and supporting improvements in student learning.

Recommendation 3.6
The Kentucky Department of Education should consider proposing alternative forms of assistance for schools facing systemic underlying challenges such as recruitment of teachers and leaders, student mobility, and lack of community support for changes necessary to meet high academic expectations.

Recommendation 3.7
The Kentucky Department of Education, in consultation with relevant groups, should consider proposing changes to KRS 160.180 and 704 KAR 3:325 to require joint training for superintendents and local school boards when district audits indicate insufficient monitoring of and insufficient support and accountability for improved student learning in low-achieving schools.

Recommendation 3.8
In revising the state's assessment and accountability system, the Kentucky Department of Education should consider proposing a system of tiered interventions for districts. This system might include options for districts identified for assistance followed by required actions for districts that do not address identified deficiencies.

Chapter 1

State and Federal Assistance and Funding

Introduction

Recent state and federal policies have focused attention on schools with low academic performance.

Recent changes in state and federal policies have refocused attention on schools with low academic performance. In the 2009 Regular Session, the General Assembly passed Senate Bill 1, which requires revision of state assessment and accountability policies to prepare all Kentucky students to be college and career ready. Despite improvements in the performance of the state's lowest-performing schools, many remain far from this goal. The federal government has increased resources and requirements for improving performance in the nation's persistently low-achieving schools. In 2010, the General Assembly passed House Bill 176, which aligns with federal goals for improving performance in these schools.

Policy makers are reexamining relationships among existing strategies, funding, and school improvement. This report will highlight strengths as well as limitations of current and previous forms of assistance. These findings might be applied to consideration of future funding for state assistance.

In a time of increased urgency and decreased state revenues, policy makers are reexamining the relationships among existing assistance strategies, funding, and school improvement. The General Assembly did not appropriate funds for the Highly Skilled Educator (HSE) program for fiscal year 2012. This program has been the cornerstone of state assistance for low-achieving schools. This report will highlight strengths and limitations of the HSE program as well as other state- and federally funded programs. These findings might be applied to consideration of future funding for state assistance and the design of new accountability policies required for the implementation of SB 1.

Description of This Study

In December 2009, the Education Assessment and Accountability Review Subcommittee directed the Office of Education Accountability to review the current performance status of districts and schools and the effects of efforts to assist them.

In December 2009, the Education Assessment and Accountability Review Subcommittee directed the Office of Education Accountability (OEA) to review the current performance status of all districts and schools, the assistance and consequences provided to underperforming districts and schools, and the effects of school and district assistance.

Data analyzed for this report include program funding, school performance, and personnel. Data also include interviews with administrators, teachers, and assistance providers.

This report uses a variety of data to identify positive trends and continuing challenges in efforts to improve outcomes in Kentucky's low-achieving schools. Staff analyzed Kentucky Department of Education (KDE) data pertaining to program funding, school and district mathematics and reading proficiency rates, school demographics, assistance received by schools and districts, and personnel. In addition, staff conducted interviews with KDE staff managing assistance to low-achieving schools, 5 superintendents, 6 district administrative staff, 6 principals, 14 teachers, 12 former highly skilled educators, 5 members of KDE Voluntary Partnership Assistance Teams, and the executive directors of the Kentucky Association of School Superintendents and the Kentucky School Boards Association. Finally, staff analyzed national research on assistance to low-achieving schools and districts.

This report expands on issues addressed in previous reports on state assistance to low-achieving schools by looking at performance of schools over time, factors associated with the success of assistance efforts, and continuing challenges not addressed by current forms of assistance.

This report is intended to expand on issues addressed in previous reports on state assistance to low-achieving schools prepared by the Legislative Research Commission's Office of Program Review and Investigations. In a report adopted in 2006 and a follow-up report adopted in 2009, Program Review analyzed effects of state assistance to low-achieving schools and found modest or no effects in most years (Commonwealth. Legislative. Program. *Highly.* 2007 and 2009). As a complement to Program Review's reports, this report examines performance of low-achieving schools over time, identifies strengths and limitations of existing assistance, and describes continuing challenges not addressed directly by current forms of assistance.

Organization of the Report

Chapter 1 provides an overview of state and federal assistance, a brief summary of research, and descriptions of new directions being explored in other states.

The remainder of Chapter 1 first provides a broad overview of state and federal assistance and consequences as they have existed in the last decade and as they have changed recently. Next, the chapter describes the cost of this assistance. The chapter provides a brief summary of education research related to improving low-achieving schools and concludes by describing new directions being explored in other states.

Chapter 2 describes performance trends in Kentucky schools and districts and the current status of Kentucky schools relative to accountability targets established in connection with the federal No Child Left Behind Act.

Chapter 2 describes performance trends in Kentucky schools and districts in the last decade. This includes percentages of Kentucky schools that have been low achieving over time as well as previously low-achieving schools that have made substantial gains. The chapter also describes the current status of Kentucky schools relative to accountability targets established by the state in

association with the federal No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB).[1] It concludes with data related to schools currently identified as persistently low achieving.

Chapter 3 synthesizes lessons learned from previous efforts to assist districts and schools.

Chapter 3 synthesizes lessons learned from previous efforts at state and federal assistance to low-achieving schools in Kentucky. The chapter discusses conditions under which previous efforts appear to have been successful and identifies a number of challenges that have not been addressed systematically through previous assistance. It also discusses the important role of districts and local school boards in improving low-achieving schools.

Assistance and Consequences to Schools

Assistance to Low-achieving Schools

State assistance to low-achieving schools has consisted primarily of support from highly skilled educators (HSEs), scholastic audits, and grants from the Commonwealth School Improvement Fund (CSIF). Federal assistance has been provided through school improvement grants.

Table 1.1 identifies assistance that has been available in the past to schools that are low achieving by standards set by Kentucky's Commonwealth Accountability Testing System (CATS) and by NCLB. With the exception of the state scholastic audits, each form of assistance has been separately funded. State assistance described in Table 1.1 and in the text that follows was last provided to schools in 2010. Program criteria will have to be revised to conform to changes in the new accountability system to be implemented in 2012. Assistance being provided to persistently low-achieving schools in the 2011 school year will be described later in this chapter.[2]

[1]No Child Left Behind (NCLB) is the name given to the most recent reauthorization of the federal Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA). This report will refer to ESEA as NCLB.
[2]Unless otherwise noted, dates associated with assessment or programmatic data in this report refer to school years.

Table 1.1
Assistance to Low-achieving Schools

Assistance	Years	Funding Source	Eligibility	Description	Statute/ Regulation
Highly Skilled Educator*	1998-present	State	Level 3 schools or by request, if funds available	School-based assistance by KDE specially trained educator or administrator	KRS 158.782
Scholastic Audit**	2000-2010	State (KDE budget)	Level 3 schools or by request, if funds available	Team of trained KDE evaluators collect and present data on multiple indicators of school quality	KRS 158.6455(4)(a), 703 KAR 5:120
Commonwealth School Improvement Fund***	1985-present	State	Schools In Need of Assistance	Funds provided to schools for use in strategies to address school needs	KRS 158.805(1)
NCLB School Improvement Grant 1003(a)	2003-present	Federal	Title I schools in School Improvement status	Grants to districts for use in addressing needs of schools that have not met goals for 2 or more consecutive years	NCLB 20 U.S.C. 6301 Section 1003(a)
NCLB School Improvement Grant 1003(g)****	2008-present	Federal	Title I schools in Major Restructuring School Improvement status	Grants to districts for use in major restructuring of schools that have not met goals for 5 consecutive years	NCLB 20 U.S.C. 6301 Section 1003(g)

*Prior to 1998, Kentucky's Distinguished Educator program provided assistance similar to the Highly Skilled Educator program.
**Scholastic audit could be described as assistance or as a consequence. Because there are no direct negative consequences for schools as a result of scholastic audits and because they result in access by the schools to trained KDE evaluators, audits are designated as assistance in the report.
***Beginning in 2008, KDE was granted authority through budget language to use Commonwealth School Improvement Fund moneys to support scholastic audits.
****The state's persistently lowest-achieving schools are eligible for a greater amount of 1003(g) funds. They must use these funds to implement specific interventions described later in this chapter.
Source: Staff analysis of state and federal laws.

The majority of state assistance has been provided to Level 3 schools as defined in 703 KAR 5:001. These are schools in the bottom one-third of schools designated as In Need of Assistance. Federal assistance has been provided to Title I schools designated as In Need of Improvement as defined in 703 KAR 5:020. Schools must have a minimum of 35 percent of students living in poverty to be eligible for Title I status and must receive Title I funding when 75 percent or more of their students are living in poverty. Many schools with low proficiency rates have not qualified for assistance by either federal or state standards.[3]

[3]Low-achieving schools might not have been identified as Level 3 schools under CATS as long as they made incremental progress. Prior to 2010, low-achieving schools that were not designated as Title I were not eligible for federal assistance.

HSEs are teachers or administrators trained to address a variety of school needs as indicated by scholastic audits. CSIF grants provide schools with funds to pursue new and innovative strategies.

In the past, the state has provided assistance to Level 3 schools—and others, when funds were available—through a combination of a highly skilled educator, a scholastic audit, and grants through the Commonwealth School Improvement Fund (CSIF). Highly skilled educators are teachers or administrators with a demonstrated ability to be successful with students and in leadership positions with educators. HSEs are trained to address a variety of school needs as indicated by scholastic audits. They tailor their assistance to the unique needs of each school. Scholastic audits describe schools' strengths and weaknesses based on a weeklong evaluation by a trained team of KDE evaluators. As stated in KRS 158.805(1), CSIF grants provide schools with additional funds to pursue "new and innovative strategies to meet the educational needs of the school's students and raise a school's performance level."

Title I schools are eligible for funding from two federal grants: 1003(a) for schools that have not met federal goals for 2 or more consecutive years, and 1003(g) for schools that have not met goals for 5 or more consecutive years. Beginning in 2010, persistently low-achieving schools were also eligible for larger 1003(g) grants to be used in implementing specific intervention options. Non-Title I middle and high schools are also eligible for these grants.

Title I schools designated as In Need of Improvement are eligible for school improvement grants through the NCLB 1003(a) and 1003(g) funds. While funds are linked to grants submitted by districts, they are to be used for improvement efforts in schools. Title I schools are eligible for 1003(a) grants after 2 or more consecutive years of failing to meet federal goals. Title I schools are eligible for additional grants through the 1003(g) fund after failing to meet goals for 5 or more consecutive years. The 1003(g) grants are intended for use in major restructuring efforts that can include but do not require severe consequences, such as the replacement of the school's principal or engagement of an external management organization to run the school. Beginning in 2010, additional 1003(g) funds were provided to support intensive assistance to the state's persistently low-achieving schools. Non-Title I middle and high schools are also eligible for these funds. Requirements for use of these funds were adopted by the state in HB 176 of the 2010 Regular Session and are discussed later in this chapter.

Consequences for Low-achieving Schools

State consequences for low-achieving schools range from mild, such as required professional development, to more severe, such as recommendations that specific personnel be removed.

Appendix A details the consequences to which low-achieving schools are subject by state and federal regulations. State consequences allowed by statute range from mild, such as the requirement that principals in Level 3 schools receive additional professional development, to severe, such as the recommendation by the commissioner of education that specific school personnel be removed. KDE rarely exercises authority to impose severe sanctions on schools or districts.

Federal consequences can be mild, such as requiring schools to provide supplemental educational services, to more severe, such as implementation of a plan for alternative governance. Consistent with national trends, districts in Kentucky have chosen "major restructuring," the least severe of the alternative governance options, to implement in schools requiring alternative governance.

Assistance and Consequences to Districts

Assistance to Districts

Neither the state nor the federal government funds programs directed specifically at assisting districts to improve schools.

Neither the state nor the federal government funds programs directed specifically at providing district-level assistance for improving low-achieving schools.[4] Table 1.2 describes major forms of assistance that have been available to districts in recent years. None of the assistance receives the level of funding or provides the intensive assistance that has been directed at low-achieving schools.

Table 1.2
Assistance to Low-achieving Districts/Districts With Low-achieving Schools

Assistance*	Years	Funding	Eligibility	Description	Statute/ Regulation
District Audit	2004-2010	State (KDE budget)	Districts with Schools in Level 3 status for two accountability cycles	Comprehensive evaluation of district practices by a trained team of KDE evaluators	703 KAR 5:130 (5)(3)
District Technical Assistance	2003-present	Federal (Title I 1003(a) and 1003(g) set aside)	NCLB districts in Improvement status	Assistance from KDE staff	703 KAR 5:130(8)(11)(b)

*District audits and technical assistance could be described as assistance or consequence. Because there are no direct negative consequences for districts as a result of scholastic audits and corrective action and because both result in access by the district to trained KDE evaluators or assisters, audits are designated as assistance in this report.
Source: Staff analysis of state and federal laws.

In the past, districts received audits if they had Level 3 schools for two consecutive accountability cycles. Districts that have not met federal accountability targets for 2 consecutive years receive technical assistance and, after 4 consecutive years, are subject to corrective action.

Kentucky law requires districts with schools that have been designated as Level 3 for two consecutive accountability cycles to undergo intensive evaluation by a trained KDE district audit team. Results of the audit are reported in person by a member of the team to the local school board. By federal requirements, districts that have not made adequate yearly progress for 2 consecutive years must have access to technical assistance from KDE. Districts that

[4]The Voluntary Partnership Assistance Teams and other forms of district assistance described in this chapter were not directly funded.

have not met goals for 4 consecutive years must be subject to corrective action.

KDE has used a variety of staffing arrangements to provide districts with assistance. Assistance is currently provided by a total of three education recovery directors, each located at one of three regional Centers for Learning Excellence.

KDE has met federal requirements for technical assistance and corrective action using a variety of staffing arrangements. While these arrangements have changed from year to year, major goals of the technical assistance and corrective action have remained the same. They include assisting districts in revision of comprehensive plans, using data to close achievement gaps, and leveraging professional development opportunities and resources. Technical assistance has been provided through, among others, district achievement gap coordinators, district support facilitators, and targeted assistance coaches. Corrective action was first provided to six pilot districts in 2006 by Voluntary Partnership Assistance Teams. These teams consisted of collaborative assistance from a Kentucky Association of School Superintendents mentor, a Kentucky School Boards Association mentor, an HSE, and a KDE staff member. Districts were later given the option to choose less intensive assistance through a State Assistance Team or join a self-selected reform network through the Network Assistance Team. In the 2009 and 2010 school years, corrective action was provided through Assist and Support School Improvement Success Teams (ASSIST) that included district achievement gap coordinators, HSEs, targeted assistance coaches, and KDE staff. Beginning in 2011, both technical assistance and corrective action are being provided by a total of three education recovery directors located at three regional Centers for Learning Excellence.

Consequences for Districts

State consequences permitted for districts range from mild, such as requiring changes to district consolidated plans, to severe, such as the recommendation that districts become state managed. Federal consequences can be mild but can also include withholding of funding or removal of district personnel.

Appendix A details the consequences to which districts with low-achieving schools and low-achieving districts are subject by state and federal regulations. State consequences range from mild, such as the requirement that districts with Level 3 schools make adjustments to their consolidated improvement plans, to severe, such as the recommendation by the commissioner of education that districts with Level 3 schools for two consecutive accountability cycles be designated state assisted or state managed. In the past, KDE has not identified districts to be state assisted or state managed based on low student achievement.

Federal consequences range from mild, such as requiring districts in improvement to develop corrective action plans, to severe, such as withholding Title I funding or recommending dismissal of district personnel. Beginning in November 2010, KDE required 13 districts in their fifth year of correction action to defer

programmatic funds and develop budgets to implement activities specified in a KDE-approved correction action plan. These districts were also required to set aside 10 percent of Title I Part A allocations for professional development aimed at closing achievement gaps and to provide quarterly progress reports to KDE. Of these 13 districts, KDE designated the 5 lowest achieving for targeted assistance. These districts will receive leadership assessments and work closely with Education Recovery Directors (described later in this chapter) and KDE staff to implement corrective action plans.[5]

Current Intervention and Assistance for Persistently Low-achieving Schools

2010 House Bill 176 introduced new methods for identifying persistently low-achieving schools and required intervention options for these schools. This legislation mirrored federal guidelines for identification and intervention.

In 2010, the General Assembly passed House Bill 176, which made substantial changes to the identification of low-achieving schools and assistance provided to them. This legislation reflected new requirements for use of NCLB 1003(g) funds and American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) 1003(g) funds directed at intervening in the state's persistently low-achieving schools. Governing regulations associated with these options are provided in 703 KAR 5:180.

Table 1.3 outlines the intervention options required for persistently low-achieving schools by KRS 160.346: external management, restaffing, school closure, and transformation. Schools choosing a particular option would also have to abide by federal guidelines associated with 1003(g) grants in persistently low-achieving schools, not all of which are specified in Kentucky's legislation. For example, federal guidelines associated with the transformation option require, among other elements, extended learning time for students, annual evaluations of teachers that include measures of student academic growth, and rewards for teachers who increase student outcomes. Federal guidelines aligned with Kentucky's external management option allow for the transfer of school governance to a charter school operator. However, Kentucky law does not allow for the management of schools by charter school operators. Appendix B contains the federal requirements associated with each intervention option.

[5]The following 13 districts are in the fifth year of corrective action consequences; districts in bold face have been identified for targeted assistance: Adair County, Bourbon County, Bullitt County, Campbell County, **Carter County,** Clark County, **Covington Independent,** Fayette County, Grayson County, **Hardin County, Jefferson County, Knox County,** and Simpson County.

Table 1.3
Intervention Options for Persistently Low-achieving Schools

Option	Requirements
External Management	Transfer management of school to an external management organization selected by a local board of education from an approved list provided by the Kentucky Board of Education.*
Restaffing	Replace the principal and the school councils unless otherwise recommended by a school leadership assessment. Screen and retain no more than 50% of faculty and staff at the school.**
School Closure	Close the school, and transfer students to schools meeting their accountability targets.
Transformation	Replace the school principal unless otherwise recommended by the school leadership assessment. Institute a set of strategies designed to turn around the school.

*Only one organization—Alvarez & Marsal Public Sector Services, based in Atlanta, Georgia— has been approved by the Kentucky Board of Education as an Educational Management Organization for use during the 2011 school year.
**Staffing decisions in restaffed schools can be made without regard to KRS 160.380(1)(c) related to filling vacant positions and KRS 160.345(2)(h)1 related to transfers.
Source: KRS 160.346.

KDE conducts leadership assessments of persistently low-achieving schools and the districts in which they are located. These assessments provide opinions on the ability of the school council, principal, and district to manage the intervention.

Prior to implementation of intervention options, KDE conducts leadership assessments of identified schools as well as districts in which the schools are located.[6] The assessments are similar to audits provided in the past but also provide opinions about the ability of the school council, principal, and the district to manage the intervention. Leadership assessments can also result in the commissioner of education recommending that the authority granted to school councils under KRS 160.345 be removed.

Federal regulations allow districts to select intervention options as a condition of receiving 1003(g) grants for persistently low-achieving schools. Beginning in 2010, persistently low-achieving schools were each eligible for up to $1.5 million in 1003(g) grants over 3 years. Kentucky requires identified schools to select one of the intervention options.

Federal regulations require districts of schools identified as persistently low achieving to choose one of the four intervention models as a condition of receiving the grant money available through the ARRA 1003(g) funds. This funding—up to $1.5 million over 3 years—is an incentive for districts to choose one of the required intervention options. However, districts can choose not to submit grants for any or all of the identified schools. In contrast, KRS 160.346 requires identified schools to choose one of the four intervention options. Thus, interventions for schools identified as persistently low achieving in Kentucky are prescribed more than is required by federal guidelines.

[6]Leadership assessments are described as audits in KRS 160.346 but as leadership assessments in the corresponding regulation and by KDE staff.

District 180

KDE created District 180, a new infrastructure to assist low-achieving schools and districts. District 180 establishes regional Centers of Learning Excellence that coordinate a variety of school-based assistance staff. KDE used HSE program funds to support school-based assistance from District 180 staff in 2011.

KDE has undergone an internal reorganization and created a new infrastructure to assist low-achieving schools and districts. The regulation governing the HSE program has been repealed and replaced with 703 KAR 5:190. This regulation authorizes establishment of regional Centers for Learning Excellence directed by education recovery directors responsible for coordinating state assistance to persistently low-achieving schools and districts. There are currently Centers for Learning Excellence located at the University of Louisville, Eastern Kentucky University, and Western Kentucky University. Education recovery directors are also coordinating technical assistance and corrective action to NCLB improvement districts.

District 180 staff provide more assistance to schools than to districts.

The regulation establishes a greater number of positions to assist schools than to assist districts. Education recovery leaders assist principals in persistently low-achieving schools; education recovery specialists guide instructional improvement in persistently low-achieving schools; and intervention specialists provide services to other low-achieving schools. In 2011, KDE used HSE appropriations to fund assistance from education recovery directors, education recovery leaders, and education recovery specialists but did not have sufficient funding to provide assistance from intervention specialists. KDE will not be able to use HSE appropriations to fund assistance in 2012 because the General Assembly did not appropriate any funds for the HSE program in that year. A total of three education recovery directors provide assistance to all identified districts.

Cost of Assistance

In the past, state funding for assistance exceeded federal funding. Beginning in fiscal year 2009, federal funding far exceeded state funding.

In the past, the majority of funding for assistance to low-achieving schools was provided by the state; beginning in fiscal year 2009; however, funding provided by the federal government through NCLB far exceeded state funding for assistance.

The overwhelming majority of state and federal funding for assistance is allocated to programs that provide direct assistance to schools.

The overwhelming majority of state and federal funding directed at improving low-achieving schools has been provided through programs that provide direct assistance to schools. Districts can play a major role in shaping grants and improvement plans; however, no state or federal programs provide funds explicitly for district assistance.

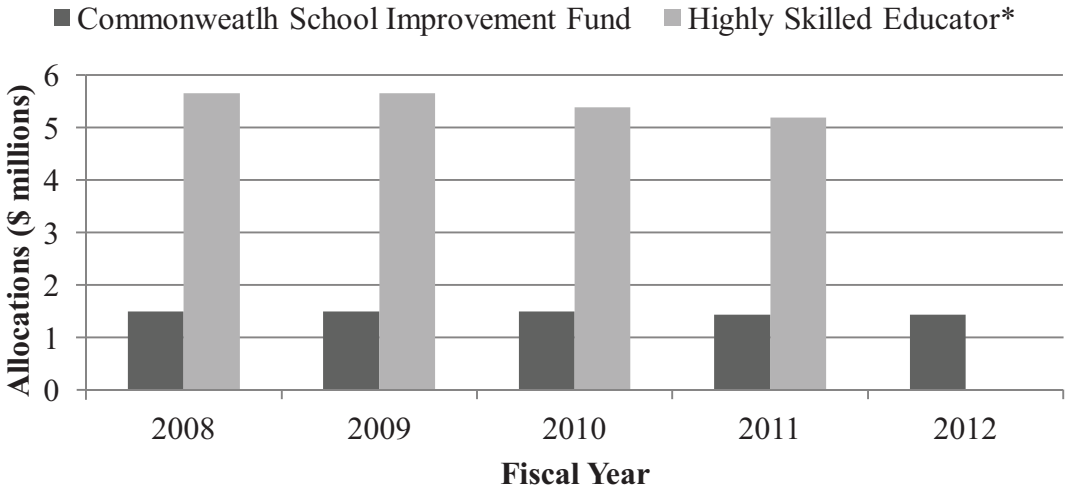
Appropriations for the HSE program have declined in recent years. No funds have been appropriated for FY 2012.

Figure 1.A shows General Assembly appropriations for fiscal years 2008 through 2012 for the Highly Skilled Educator and Commonwealth School Improvement Fund programs. As the figure shows, appropriations for the HSE program declined from approximately $5.5 million in FY 2008 to $5.2 million in FY 2011. As recently as FY 2004, HSE appropriations were $6.4 million. In FY 2011, KDE used HSE funding to support District 180 staff assisting persistently low-achieving schools. The General Assembly did not appropriate any funds for the HSE program in FY 2012.

CSIF appropriations have declined slightly in recent years. Beginning in FY 2009, KDE used CSIF funds to support scholastic audits and other KDE assistance efforts.

Appropriations for the CSIF fund have declined slightly from approximately $1.5 million in FY 2008 to $1.4 million in FY 2012. Beginning in FY 2008, the commissioner of education is authorized through budget language to use CSIF funds to provide support to schools requiring assistance through NCLB. In FY 2009, $1.07 million of the CSIF funds was used for scholastic audits and targeted assistance coaches. In FY 2010, all the CSIF funds were used for scholastic audits. An additional $300,000 of federal funds was used to provide leadership assessments for persistently low-achieving schools. CSIF funds are also being used to support leadership assessments in FY 2011 (Desai).

Figure 1.A
Appropriations for the Highly Skilled Educator and Commonwealth School Improvement Funds
Fiscal Year 2008-Fiscal Year 2012



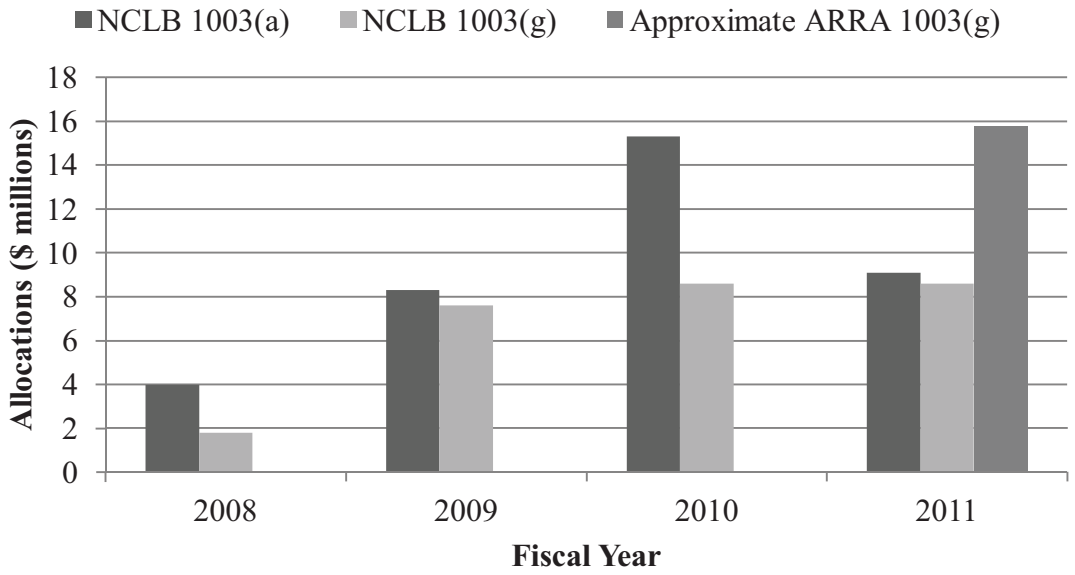
*In FY 2011, the Highly Skilled Educator funds were used to support District 180 staff.
Source: Staff analysis of data from the Kentucky Department of Education.

Prior to 2009, scholastic audits were funded through the Kentucky Department of Education budget. A previous report identified expenditures of $375,396 for scholastic audits in FY 2004 (Commonwealth. Legislative. *Analysis* 104). Each audit costs between $14,000 and $20,000 (Commonwealth. Legislative. Program. *Highly*. 2007 39).

Federal funding for school assistance has increased in recent years. Total funding for 1003(a) and 1003(g) grants was approximately $33 million in FY 2011.

Figure 1.B shows total allocations from the federal government to KDE through Title I school improvements grants 1003(a) and 1003(g). The total allocation from these two funds was approximately $5.7 million in FY 2008, less than the $7.2 million in state funding for that year. Beginning in FY 2009, however, the $15 million in federal funding for school assistance began to exceed state funding, which remained flat at $7.2 million. In FY 2011, federal funding for schools in need of improvement was approximately $33.4 million, boosted by additional funding for 1003(g) grants through the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act. The overwhelming majority of federal funds will be distributed in grants to Title I schools. Beginning in FY 2010, non-Title I middle and high schools became eligible for 1003(g) grants if they were identified as persistently low achieving.

Figure 1.B
Federal NCLB School Improvement and American Recovery and Reinvestment Act School Improvement Grants
Fiscal Year 2008-Fiscal Year 2011



Note: Annual allocations for ARRA 1003(g) are approximate. Funds were awarded in a one-time grant of $47,316,734 to be spent over 3 years.
Source: Staff analysis of data from the Kentucky Department of Education.

In FY 2009, the minimum amount awarded to individual schools was $54,000 through the 1003(a) fund and $118,000 through the 1003(g) fund.

The majority of federal school improvement grant funding is received by districts for use in the identified schools. In FY 2009, the minimum amount awarded to an individual school through the 1003(a) school improvement fund was $54,000, and the minimum awarded to schools through the 1003(g) school improvement fund was $118,000. KDE retains 5 percent of the total allocations for administration of the grants.

Beginning in FY 2010, the minimum amount awarded to persistently low-achieving schools was approximately $312,000.

Beginning in FY 2010, persistently low-achieving schools were eligible for larger grants funded by ARRA for the 1003(g) school improvement grants. Of the 10 schools identified in FY 2010, 6 Jefferson County Schools will each be receiving $935,547 over 3 years (approximately $312,000 per year), and the remaining 4 high schools will be receiving approximately $1.5 million over 3 years.

Review of Research

Education research identifies clear differences between low- and high-achieving schools but has yet to identify strategies that consistently transform schools from one to the other. Effects of existing strategies—including those required by 2010 HB 176—have been disappointing.

Research has identified limitations of existing efforts to improve low-achieving schools but has yet to demonstrate success associated with alternative strategies. While education research consistently identifies characteristics of ineffective and effective schools, it offers little guidance about strategies that are likely to transform one to the other (Brady). Many schools have improved following assistance; however, no single type of assistance has been demonstrated to produce academic gains in low-achieving schools that are, on average, greater than gains in low-achieving schools without assistance. Effects associated with many different types of assistance—including those required by 2010 HB 176—have been disappointing. These include Comprehensive School Reform Programs (Orland); school reconstitution, which is similar to the restaffing model (Rice and Malen); and conversion of a failing school into a charter school (Zimmer).

Most assistance efforts focus primarily on programmatic changes, overlooking fundamental challenges associated with school staffing and context. These types of efforts alone are unlikely to have great impact in schools facing deep challenges.

Most school assistance efforts have focused on making programmatic changes to curriculum, professional development, or school schedules while overlooking fundamental needs associated with school staffing and school context. The assumption is that low-achieving schools will improve if they adopt the systems and structures of successful schools. However, this may not be true in schools facing systemic challenges such as teacher recruitment and retention.

Low-achieving, high-minority, and high-poverty schools face challenges recruiting and retaining teachers.

Low-achieving, high-minority, and high-poverty schools face challenges recruiting and retaining teachers. High-minority, high-poverty schools are not first choice for many teacher applicants; these schools tend to have disproportionately low percentages of teachers with strong preservice qualifications (Clotfelter). Teacher attrition rates are also higher in schools with low achievement (Boyd).

Many of the challenges facing students in low-achieving schools are not addressed directly through assistance efforts. These include student mobility, malnutrition, stress, and poor health.

School assistance tends to focus on characteristics of schools; however, research indicates that students' race and poverty level are more powerful predictors of school performance than any school interventions. Most of the challenges associated with demographic characteristics are not addressed directly in schools. These include student mobility, malnutrition, stress, and poor health (Rothstein).[7]

These limitations apply to the HSE program, which has been the cornerstone of state assistance efforts in Kentucky.

These limitations apply to the HSE program. A previous study of the HSE program suggested that the program was less likely to be effective in schools facing deep challenges (David). A survey of states with programs similar to the HSE program also suggests that these programs are less likely to be effective in chronically low-achieving schools facing substantial challenges (Calkins 94).

While most state accountability systems include severe consequences for low-achieving schools and districts, these consequences generally are not enforced. There is little evidence that imposition of severe consequences on schools and districts is likely to spur sustained improvements in student learning.

Many state accountability systems include severe consequences for low-achieving schools and districts. Policy makers have been hesitant to enforce these consequences because of the political and financial costs (Mintrop). Similarly, districts have been hesitant to choose the most severe options, such as school closure, available for schools in major restructuring status under NCLB. Most choose mild or moderate interventions (DiBiase; Brady). No evidence links imposition of severe consequences, such as restaffing, to improvements in student learning. Similarly, no evidence links aggressive action by states on local districts to sustained improvement in schools. Effective state action requires, but often lacks, community support (Slotnik).

Districts play a key and often overlooked role in promoting sustained improvements in school performance. They are often in a better position than are states to build school capacity and address the comprehensive conditions necessary to improve schools.

Districts play a key role in sustainable efforts to improve school performance. They are often in a better position than are states to build school capacity and address the comprehensive conditions necessary to improve schools (Mintrop). Some have argued for a strong, centralized role for districts in improving low-achieving schools. In this role, districts promote a coherent, district wide strategy that links curriculum, professional development, and

[7]Kentucky's Family Resource and Youth Services Centers program is intended to address many of these barriers. In 2010, the General Assembly appropriated $54 million to support this program.

staffing practices (Elmore). Others have advocated for district management of a portfolio of options for improving low-achieving schools. These options could include traditional public schools, alternative public schools, and charter schools (Lake). Each of these district approaches has been associated with some success in individual districts. Broader effects of these district approaches have not been studied systematically.

Whereas sustained attention and political will at all levels of government are necessary to improve low-achieving schools, both are rare.

Whereas sustained attention and political will at all levels of government are necessary to improve low-achieving schools, both are rare. Efforts to improve low-achieving schools require coordination of goals and support from state and local leaders and local communities. The state might play a key role in drawing and sustaining attention of local leaders and communities to the goal of improving low-achieving schools (Calkins; Slotnik).

New Directions

Through the Race to the Top fund, the federal government has encouraged states to experiment with new strategies to improve low-achieving schools. Kentucky may stand to benefit from lessons learned by other states pursuing highly funded new strategies.

Recognizing the limitations of existing forms of assistance to low-achieving schools, the federal government encouraged states to experiment with new strategies by offering competitive grants through its Race to the Top fund of more than $4 billion. While Kentucky was among the finalists for this award, it was not among the 13 winners. Kentucky may stand to benefit from lessons learned by other states pursuing highly funded new strategies.

Massachusetts is pursuing strategies that include developing teacher and leader pipelines, providing financial incentives to work in low-achieving schools, and supporting coordinated social services to address nonacademic barriers in low-achieving schools.

Among the Race to the Top winners, Massachusetts received the highest score for its plans to identify and turn around low-achieving schools. The state plans to pursue a range of strategies that include

- identifying and training a pipeline of teachers and leaders with demonstrated ability to be successful with students in low-achieving schools,
- providing financial incentives for specifically trained teachers and leaders to work in low-achieving schools,
- ensuring a minimum supply of 30 percent of experienced, effective teachers as new hires in restaffed schools,
- identifying and expanding the service of providers that have been successful in supporting school turnaround efforts or teachers and principal training, and
- supporting coordinated “wraparound zones” of social service agencies to address nonacademic barriers to learning in low-achieving schools (United States).

Massachusetts has also developed a tiered approach to accountability for low-performing districts and schools that includes continuous monitoring by the state department of education.

Massachusetts has already enacted laws supporting a tiered approach to identifying low-achieving schools and districts that include annual evaluations by the state department of education of these schools and districts and increasing state authority to intervene in schools and districts that fail to improve (United States).

Georgia plans to include signing bonuses for teachers willing to teach in shortage areas in rural schools and performance pay for teachers in low-achieving schools. Tennessee plans to implement or monitor interventions in the state's lowest-achieving schools and intensify existing efforts to train and recruit teachers for low-achieving schools and shortage areas.

Georgia and Tennessee were also awarded Race to the Top funding for highly rated assistance strategies for low-achieving schools and for equitable distribution of teachers and principals. For example, Georgia's plan includes signing bonuses for teachers willing to teach in shortage areas in rural schools, performance pay for teachers in low-achieving schools who are demonstrated to be effective through the state's evaluation system, and development of leadership pipelines for low-achieving schools through work with external partners. Tennessee's plan calls for creation of a state Achievement School District to manage or monitor interventions in the state's lowest-achieving schools, expansion of an urban teacher residency program, and a $12 million competitive grant to support alternative compensation (United States).

Chapter 2

Trends and Current Status of Low-achieving Schools and Districts

Introduction

This chapter presents data showing both improvements and continuing challenges in the state's low-achieving schools and districts. Schools and districts that were in the lower performance ranges in 2009 had substantially higher student proficiency rates than schools in the lower performance ranges a decade ago. While most previously low-achieving schools are still performing below state averages, a small percentage now exceed state averages, with some among the state's highest-performing schools.

Data also indicate two distinct trends associated with the state's lowest-achieving schools. First, many of these schools are in the state's more urban districts and far exceed the state at large in percentages of students living in poverty and percentages of minority students. Second, by current measures, the state's lowest-achieving schools are high schools with especially low proficiency rates in mathematics. Thus, as will be discussed in Chapter 3, it is especially critical that the state's assistance strategies be designed to address challenges likely to be facing these schools and districts.

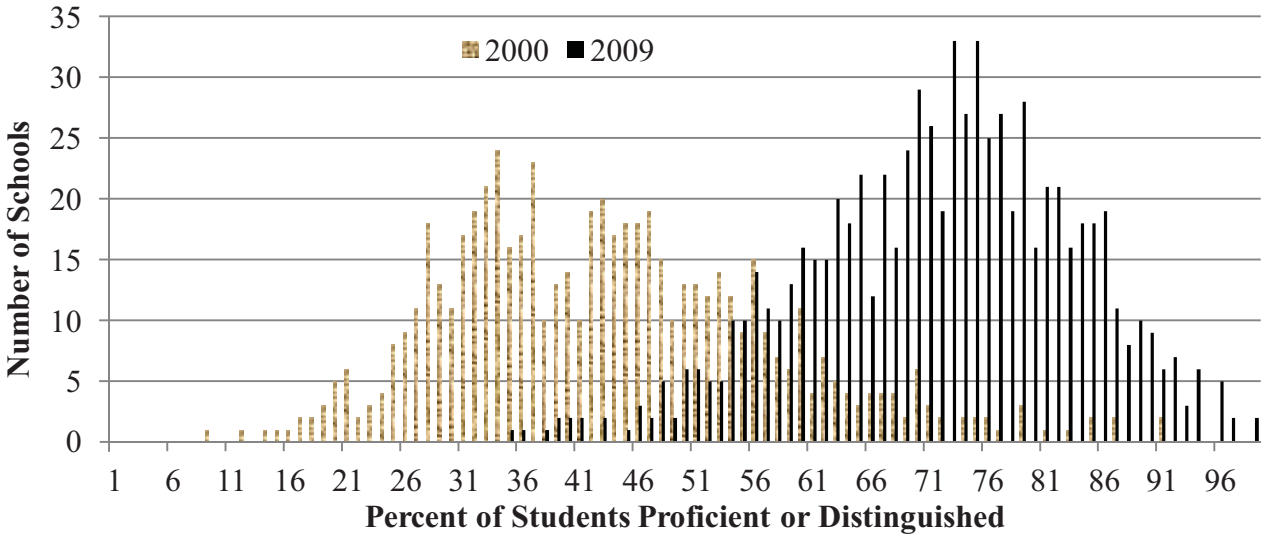
School Performance 2000-2009

Gains in Low-achieving Schools

Schools in the lower achievement ranges in 2009 had substantially higher proficiency rates than schools in the lower achievement ranges in 2000; however, large gaps remain between lower performers and state averages.

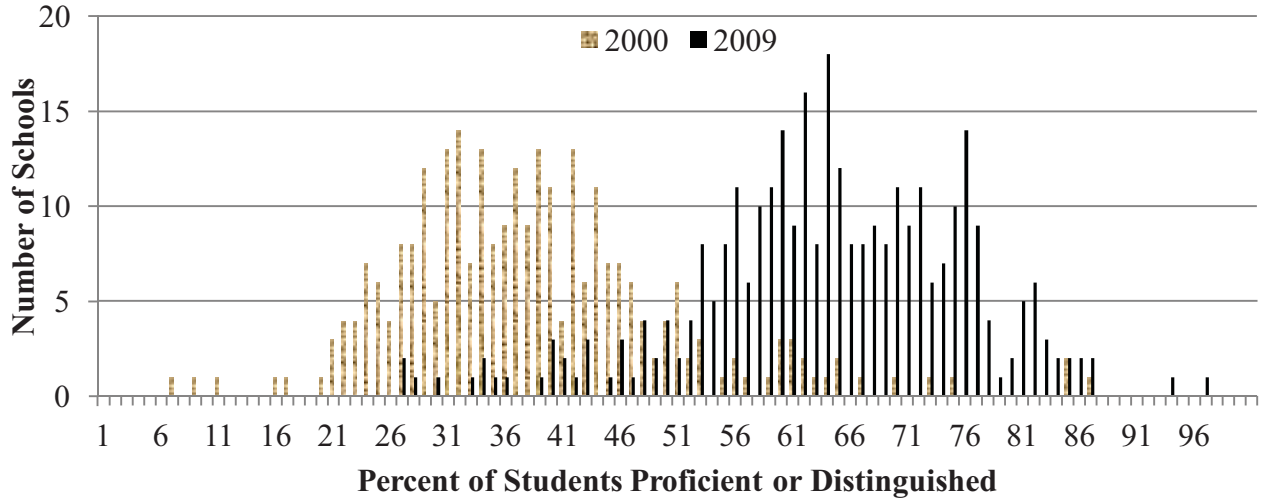
Figures 2.A, 2.B, and 2.C show school proficiency rates in reading and mathematics combined on the Kentucky Core Content Test (KCCT) in 2000 and 2009. The figures illustrate increases in proficiency rates across the board, including substantial increases in the proficiency rates of schools in the lower achievement ranges in 2009 compared to schools in the lower achievements ranges in 2000. Increases in average proficiency rates among the state's lowest-achieving schools—those in the lowest 10 percent—were greater at the elementary level than at the middle or high school levels. Schools in the lowest 10 percent in 2009 scored higher than schools in the lowest 10 percent in 2000 by 31 percentage points at the elementary level, 20 percentage points at the middle school level, and 22 percentage points at the high school level.

Figure 2.A
Percentage of Students Proficient or Distinguished
KCCT Reading and Mathematics
Elementary Schools
2000 and 2009



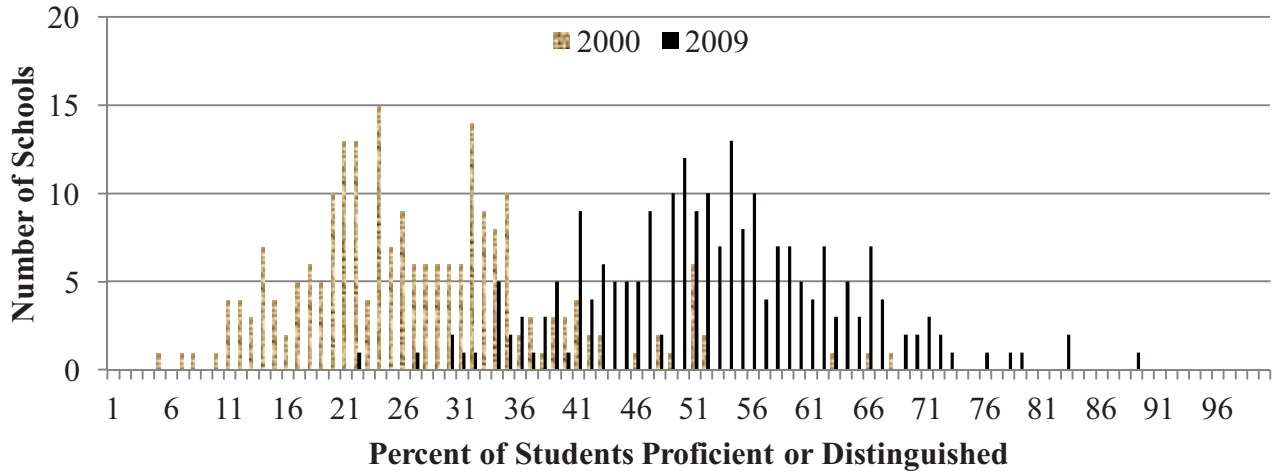
Source: Staff analysis of data from the Kentucky Department of Education.

Figure 2.B
Percentage of Students Proficient or Distinguished
KCCT Reading and Mathematics
Middle Schools
2000 and 2009



Source: Staff analysis of data from the Kentucky Department of Education.

Figure 2.C
Percentage of Students Proficient or Distinguished
KCCT Reading and Mathematics
High Schools
2000 and 2009



Source: Staff analysis of data from the Kentucky Department of Education.

Persistent Gaps Between Low-achieving Schools and State Averages

Gaps between the lowest achievers and state averages have increased at the middle and high school levels.

While low-achieving schools are performing substantially higher in 2009 than they were in 2000, they still lag state averages. Table 2.1 shows average reading and math proficiency rates for all schools and for the lowest-achieving 10 percent of schools in 2000 and 2009. The lowest-achieving 10 percent of elementary schools lagged state averages by approximately the same margin in 2009 as in 2000. At the middle and high school levels, gaps between the lowest-achieving 10 percent of schools and state averages have widened. Table 2.1 also shows increases in combined reading and math proficiency rates in all schools between 2000 and 2009. Proficiency rates increased by 29, 26, and 25 percentage points in all elementary, middle, and high schools, respectively.

Table 2.1
Difference Between Lowest-achieving Schools and All Schools
Students Proficient or Distinguished
KCCT Reading and Mathematics
2000 and 2009

	Percentage of Students Proficient or Distinguished					
	2000			2009		
School Level	Lowest 10 Percent of Schools	All Schools	Difference	Lowest 10 Percent of Schools	All Schools	Difference
Elementary	21.0%	42.9%	21.9%	50.6%	71.9%	21.3%
Middle	20.5	37.8	17.3	40.8	63.7	22.9
High	10.8	26.6	15.8	33.2	51.8	18.6

Source: Staff analysis of data from the Kentucky Department of Education.

Caution Interpreting Gains

No single indicator can measure student learning relative to the state's learning goals. Therefore, gains reported in this chapter should be interpreted with caution. Data from the National Assessment of Educational Progress over the same period indicate more modest gains than Kentucky Core Content Test data.

Data reported in Figures 2.A, 2.B, and 2.C provide narrow measures of student achievement relative to the state's broad educational goals. Assessments in other subject areas, college readiness exams, and graduation rates, among other measures, are necessary to provide a more comprehensive assessment of school-level gains. Also, no single indicator can adequately measure student learning relative to the state's learning goals, even in single subject areas such as reading and mathematics. Data from the National Assessment of Educational Progress over the same period indicate more modest gains in reading and mathematics than are indicated by Table 2.1.[1]

Continuing Low Achievement in Many Schools

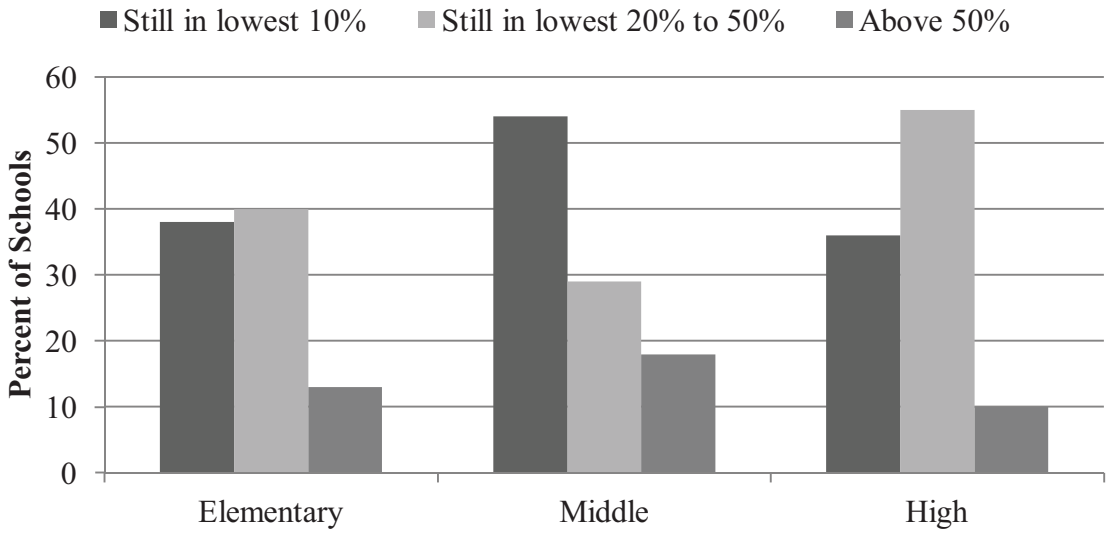
Despite substantial increases in proficiency rates, schools that were low-achieving in 2000 and 2001 were likely to be low-achieving in 2008 and 2009, relative to their peers. However, a small percentage of previously lower performing schools are now among the state's top performers.

Despite substantial increases in proficiency rates, schools that were low-achieving in 2000 and 2001 were likely to be low-achieving in 2008 and 2009, relative to their peers. Figure 2.D shows the 2008 and 2009 performance rank of schools that were in the lowest

[1]The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) provides data in reading and mathematics at the 4th and 8th grades only. Kentucky's proficiency rates in reading and mathematics have increased in all grades but have been most substantial in 4th-grade mathematics, where they increased 20 percentage points between 2000 and 2009. Between 2000 and 2009, 8th-grade NAEP math proficiency rates increased by 7 percentage points. Between 2002 and 2009, reading proficiency rates increased by 6 percentage points at the 4th-grade level and by 1 percentage point at the 8th-grade level.

10 percent of schools in 2000 and 2001. Schools were ranked according to the percentage of students scoring proficient or distinguished in reading and mathematics combined in 2008 and 2009. As the figure shows, roughly one-third of elementary and high schools and more than one-half of middle schools that were in the lowest 10 percent of schools nearly a decade ago were still in the lowest 10 percent in 2008 and 2009, and most were still performing below state averages. Figure 2.D also shows that a small percentage of these previously lowest-achieving schools have shown dramatic gains, not only in their proficiency rates but in their performance ranks relative to their peers. Twelve percent of elementary schools, 18 percent of middle schools, and 10 percent of high schools that were in the lowest 10 percent in 2000 and 2001 were performing at or above the median for their school levels by 2008 and 2009. Of these, four elementary schools, two middle schools, and two high schools were ranked in the top 20 percent of schools at their levels. These schools illustrate the dramatic gains that are possible even for the lowest-achieving schools.

Figure 2.D
Performance Rank of Schools That Were in the Lowest 10 Percent in 2000 and 2001 by School Level 2008 and 2009



Note: Schools were ranked according to the average of the percentage of students scoring proficient or distinguished in reading and mathematics combined in 2008 and 2009.
Source: Staff analysis of data from the Kentucky Department of Education.

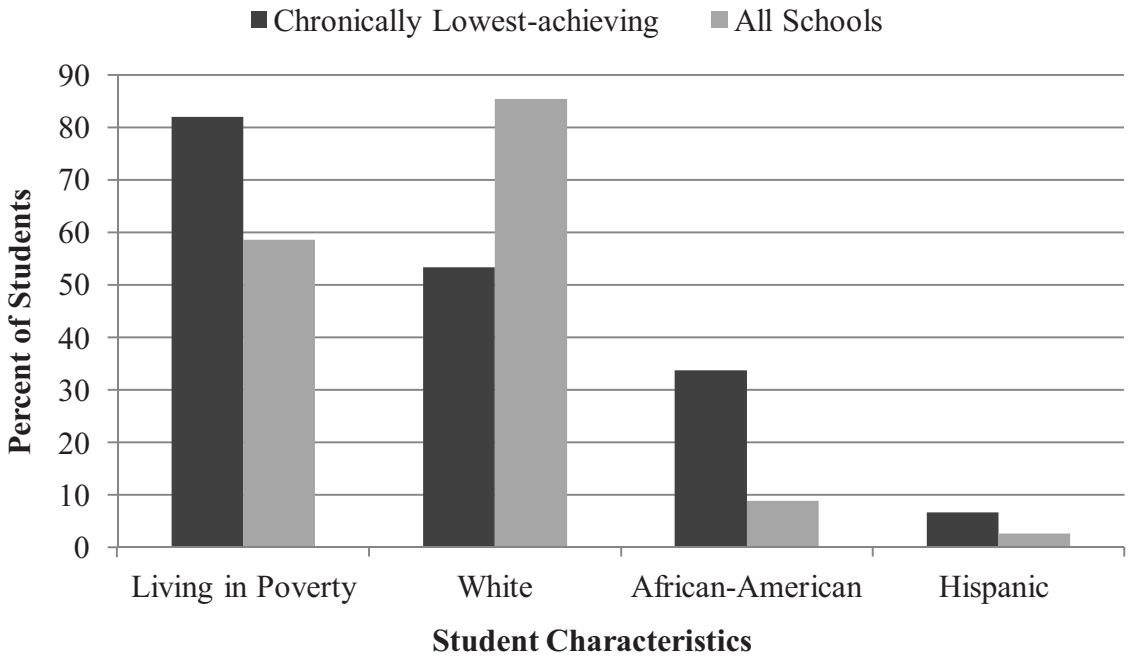
Chronically Lowest-achieving Schools

Of the schools that were in the lowest 10 percent of schools in both 2000-2001 and 2008-2009, 27 are of particular concern. These schools, which will be called chronically lowest-achieving in this report, have remained in the lowest 10 percent of schools in the last decade and have also fallen short of average state proficiency gains. Some, but not all, of the chronically lowest-achieving schools have also been identified among the persistently low-achieving schools reported later in this chapter.[2]

Chronically lowest-achieving schools have higher percentages of students living in poverty and higher percentages of minority students than do all Kentucky schools.

Figure 2.E shows demographic characteristics of chronically lowest-achieving schools. These schools have higher percentages of students living in poverty and higher percentages of African-American and Hispanic students than do all Kentucky schools.

Figure 2.E
Demographic Characteristics of
Chronically Lowest-achieving Schools
2009



Source: Staff analysis of data from the Kentucky Department of Education.

[2]As will be described at the end of this chapter, data on persistently low-achieving schools are calculated from achievement data in the last 3 years. Elementary, middle, and high schools are ranked together. In contrast, OEA identified schools as chronically low achieving based on a decade of achievement data and ranked schools at the elementary, middle, and high school levels separately.

The overwhelming majority of chronically lowest-achieving schools are located in urban districts, with most located in Jefferson County.

The overwhelming majority of chronically lowest-achieving schools—23 out of 27—are located in urban areas, with most—19—located in Jefferson County. The remaining chronically lowest-achieving schools are located in the eastern part of the state.

Kentucky data reflect national data in the concentration of low-achieving schools in urban areas.

Kentucky data on demographic characteristics of low-achieving schools reflect national data. Nationally, schools identified as persistently low-achieving in 2009 by federal standards had disproportionate percentages of minority and poor students. Compared to the nation, low-achieving schools had more than three times the percentage of African-American students, double the percentage of students living in poverty, and one and one-half times the percentage of Hispanic students. Fifty-four percent of persistently low-achieving schools were located in urban areas, compared to 25 percent nationally (Communities 8-10).

In looking for causes of and possible solutions to low achievement policy makers should look not only to specific practices of schools in Jefferson County and other low-achieving districts but also to systemic challenges that appear to impact similar schools across the nation.

Data showing high concentrations of Kentucky low-achieving schools in Jefferson County should be interpreted in light of national trends indicating disproportionate numbers of urban, high-minority, high-poverty schools that have been identified as persistently low-achieving. Low-achieving Kentucky schools are a pressing concern for state policy makers. In looking for causes of and possible solutions to low achievement, however, policy makers should look not only to specific practices of schools in Jefferson County and other low-achieving districts but also to systemic challenges that appear to impact similar schools across the nation.

In 2009, Jefferson County 4th and 8th graders performed better in reading and mathematics than students in other large cities; however, Jefferson County black students and students living in poverty performed less well in math than their large-city peers.

National comparative are useful in judging the performance of Jefferson County schools relative to schools located in similar districts. Appendix C contains National Assessment of Educational Progress data showing that, in 2009, Jefferson County 4th and 8th graders performed better in reading than students in other large cities and similarly in math. However, Jefferson County black students and students living in poverty performed less well than their large-city peers in math.

Jefferson County student assignment practices are likely to concentrate high- and low-achieving high school students in specific schools. Thus the district contains both the state's highest- and lowest-achieving high schools.

Jefferson County's school achievement data should also be interpreted in light of distinct student assignment patterns. The student assignment plan in Jefferson County allows parents to request specific schools. Several of the district's high schools require evidence of high academic performance as entrance criteria. Thus, some of the district's schools contain a disproportionate percentage of students who have already demonstrated high academic ability. By extension, other schools likely contain a disproportionate percentage of students who have not demonstrated high academic ability or who have not chosen to

apply to more competitive schools. Appendix D provides data showing that persistently low-achieving schools in Jefferson County have very low percentages of students who requested transfer into the school in comparison to other district schools. As would be expected from this student assignment pattern, the district contains a disproportionate number of the state's highest- and lowest-achieving high schools. Kentucky's top two highest-achieving high schools are also located in Jefferson County.

Jefferson County has received a large percentage of state and federal funding available to assist low-achieving schools. However, as will be discussed in Chapter 3, this assistance has not directly addressed some of the systemic challenges facing schools in the district.

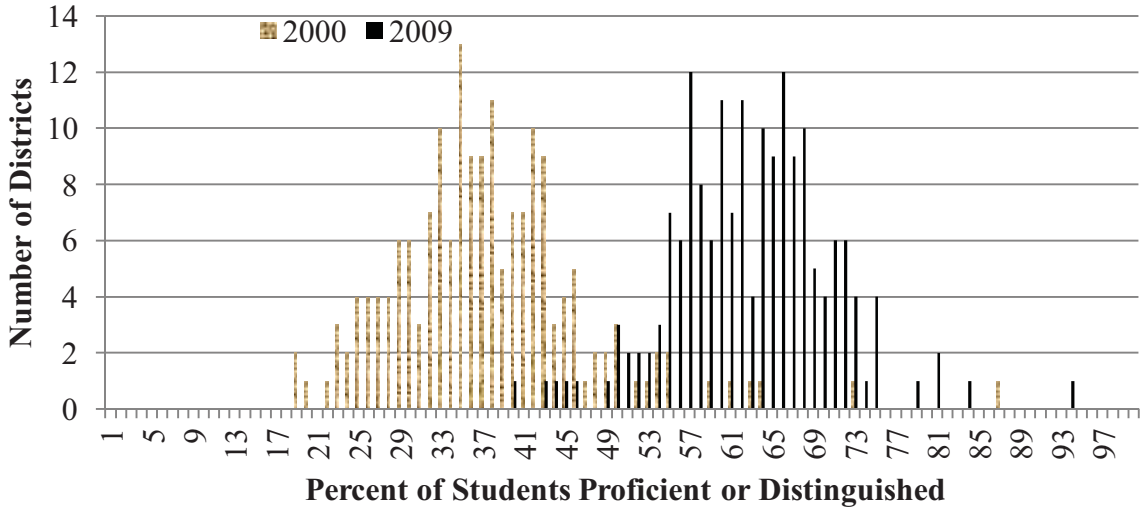
Chapter 3 focuses explicitly on challenges facing schools in Jefferson County, especially the recruitment and retention of teachers and leaders to low-achieving schools. The county has received much of the state and federal funding available to assist these schools. However, to date, this assistance has not directly addressed staffing and other systemic challenges facing many low-achieving schools in Jefferson County.

District Performance 2000-2009

As with schools, the proficiency rates for the lowest-achieving districts were substantially higher in 2009 than they were in 2000.

Figure 2.F shows average math and reading proficiency rates for Kentucky districts in 2000 and 2009. As with schools, the proficiency rates for the lowest-achieving districts were substantially higher in 2009 than they were in 2000.

Figure 2.F
Percentage of Students Proficient or Distinguished
KCCT Reading and Mathematics by District
2000 and 2009

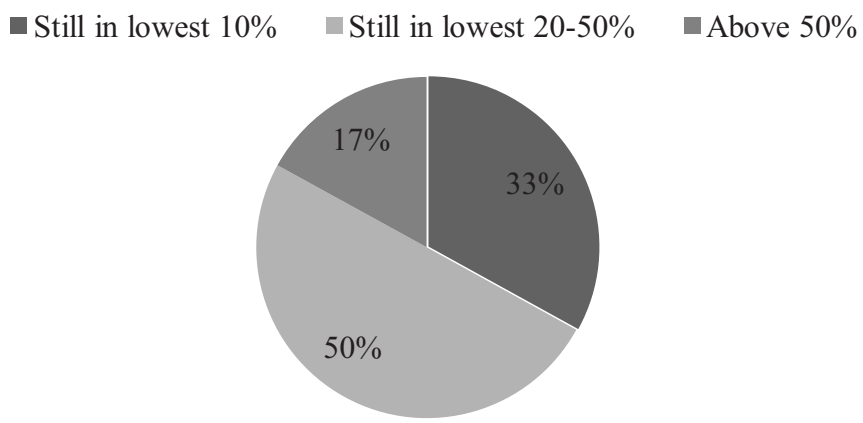


Source: Staff analysis of data from the Kentucky Department of Education.

About one-third of the 17 districts that were in the lowest 10 percent of districts in 2000 were still in the lowest 10 percent in 2009, with the majority still below state averages. However, three of these districts were performing above the state average by 2009.

As shown by Figure 2.G, about one-third of the 17 districts that were in the lowest 10 percent of districts in 2000 were still in the lowest 10 percent in 2009, with the majority still performing below state averages. However, three of these districts were performing above the state average by 2009.

Figure 2.G
2009 Performance Rank of Districts That Were in the Lowest 10 Percent in 2000



Note: Districts were ranked according to the percentage of students proficient or distinguished on KCCT reading and mathematics combined.
Source: Staff analysis of data from the Kentucky Department of Education.

Challenges in Identifying Schools and Districts for Assistance

In the past decade, two methods have been used to identify schools as low-achieving, one through the state's Commonwealth Accountability Testing System (CATS) and the other through the state's compliance with No Child Left Behind (NCLB).

Two methods have been used to identify schools for assistance in the past decade, one through CATS and the other through NCLB. The accountability index used in CATS has been described in detail in previous reports (Commonwealth. Legislative. Program, *Highly.* 2007 4-7). Previous reports have also described the methods used to identify failing schools under NCLB as well as the major differences between the two systems (Commonwealth. Legislative. Office. *Review* 61-63).

In the early years of the decade, both systems failed to identify some of the state's lowest achievers as needing assistance.

The methods used by CATS and NCLB for identifying low-achieving schools have had limitations. First, because these systems were based on growth targets anchored in expectations of 100 percent student proficiency in 2014, many schools with low performance were not identified for assistance in the early years of implementation. Under CATS, a school with extremely low performance in the baseline biennium of 1998-2000 might not be identified for state assistance for many years as long as it made

modest annual gains.[3] For example, of the 46 Kentucky schools that were in the lowest 10 percent in the 2008 and 2009 school years and the 2000 and 2001 school years, 13 have never been identified in the bottom third of the In Need of Assistance category.[4] Similarly, in the early years of NCLB, many low-achieving schools were considered successful. Annual performance targets were low in these years.

In the years leading up to 2014, both CATS and NCLB would likely identify the majority of Kentucky schools as in need of assistance.

Second, in the years leading up to 2014, both the CATS and NCLB accountability models would likely identify the majority of Kentucky schools and districts as failing, thus reducing the credibility of the measures for practitioners and the public. Based on assessment results for 2010, 44 percent of schools and 65 percent of districts failed to make adequate yearly progress (AYP). These numbers will increase substantially based on 2011 scores because the targets needed to make AYP are increasing each year.

Accountability systems have had difficulty arriving at single measures that reflected schools' overall performance as well as their areas of weakness.

Finally, prior accountability systems have had difficulty arriving at single measures that reflected schools' overall performance as well as their areas of weakness. Because the accountability index used for CATS combined performance measures in multiple subjects, a school might be considered progressing or meeting goal despite having very low performance in a specific subject area or with a specific population. In contrast, the calculation of AYP for NCLB takes into account the performance of student subgroups in both reading and mathematics. Because of the many individual goals that schools must meet to make AYP, a school that was relatively successful by state standards could be considered In Need of Improvement under NCLB by failing to meet goals for one subgroup in one subject. In many instances, schools deemed In Need of Improvement under the federal accountability model were considered to be progressing or meeting goal in the state accountability model and vice versa. The range of goals has proven challenging and confusing for many districts and schools.

The Kentucky Department of Education is attempting to address the shortcomings of previous accountability systems in its development of the new accountability system mandated through 2009 SB 1.

The Kentucky Department of Education is attempting to address the shortcomings of previous accountability systems in its development of the new accountability system mandated through 2009 SB 1. This system will provide multiple measures of school

[3] A surprising number of schools performing in the higher percentiles, including several in the top 20 percent of schools, were also identified under this system.

[4] These figures are based on KDE data indicating which schools have received assistance from a highly skilled educator. According to 703 KAR 5:120 Section 3, schools identified in the bottom third of the In Needs Assistance category are required to have an HSE.

success in the areas of academic growth, academic achievement, achievement gaps at all levels, college readiness at the middle and high school levels, and graduation rates and career readiness at the high school level.

Current Status of Low-achieving Schools

No Child Left Behind

According to targets established in connection with NCLB, 26 percent of elementary schools, 65 percent of middle schools, and 85 percent of high schools failed to meet all of their goals in 2010. Thirty Title I schools are currently required to develop or implement plans for alternative governance. Sixty-five percent of districts failed to meet all of their NCLB goals in 2010. Of these, 63 are in corrective action and 13 are in the fifth year of corrective action.

In the absence of an updated state accountability system, Kentucky schools and districts are currently classified as low-achieving based on guidelines established by NCLB. These guidelines are identifying increasing numbers of schools and districts as low-achieving. In 2010, 26 percent of elementary schools, 65 percent of middle schools and 85 percent of high schools failed to meet all of their AYP goals.[5] A total of 30 Title I schools have failed to meet AYP for 5 or more years and are required to develop or implement plans for alternative governance as described in Appendix A. Of the 65 percent of districts that failed to meet their AYP goals, 13 are in their fifth year of corrective action consequences (Commonwealth. Department. *2010* 5-6).[6]

Schools With Less Than 50 Percent of Students Proficient or Distinguished in Reading or Mathematics

In the absence of updated methods for identifying low-achieving schools, OEA staff used a simple measure to illustrate percentages of Kentucky schools that should, in theory, be of concern to policy makers and in possible need of assistance: schools in which less than 50 percent of students are proficient in mathematics and reading.

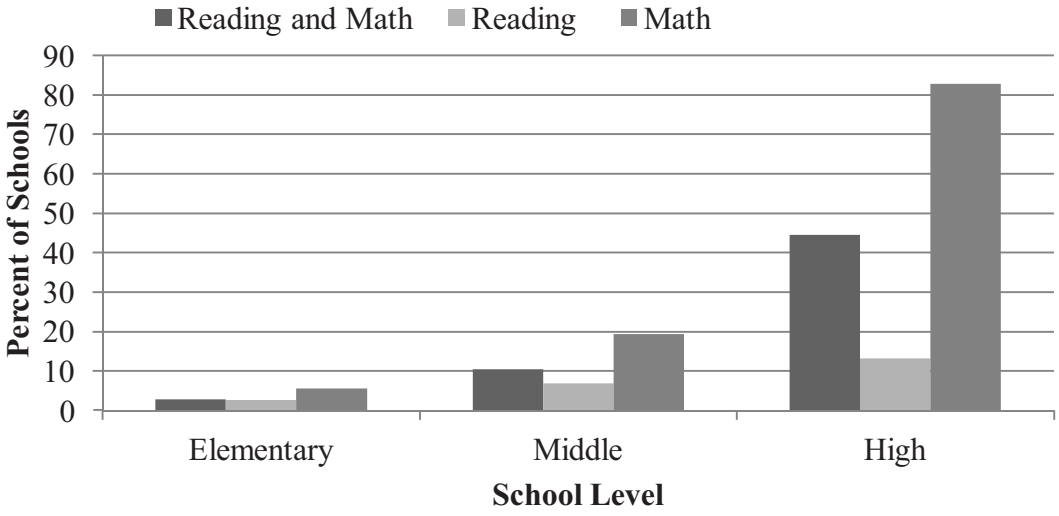
In 2009, 3 percent of elementary schools, 10 percent of middle schools, and 44 percent of high schools had student proficiency rates of less than 50 percent on KCCT reading and mathematics combined. Only 17 percent of high schools had math proficiency rates greater than 50 percent.

Figure 2.H shows the percentages of Kentucky elementary, middle, and high schools in which less than 50 percent of students attained a score of proficient or distinguished on the KCCT reading and math assessments in 2009. Two trends are evident. First, the percentages of schools with low performance increase dramatically from the elementary through the middle to the high school levels. Less than 3 percent of elementary schools have combined proficiency rates of less than 50 percent in reading and mathematics, compared to 10 percent of middle schools and 44 percent of high schools. Second, at every level, far greater

[5]Of those failing to meet their goals, approximately one-third met more than 80 percent of their goals.
[6]Of these, more than half met 80 percent or more of their goals.

percentages of schools have low proficiency rates in math than in reading. This difference is especially striking at the high school level. Thirteen percent of high schools have proficiency rates of less than 50 percent in reading, compared to 83 percent of high schools with proficiency rates of less than 50 percent in math.

Figure 2.H
Schools With Less Than 50 Percent of Students Proficient or Distinguished
KCCT Reading and Mathematics by School Level
2009



Source: Staff analysis of data from the Kentucky Department of Education.

These trends are generally interpreted to indicate greater concerns about teaching and learning in Kentucky high schools than in elementary or middle schools. This assumption is reflected in current funding priorities; the overwhelming majority of assistance for low-achieving schools in 2011 has been allocated to high schools, with funds focused on improving teaching and learning in identified schools.

These trends are generally interpreted to indicate priority concerns about teaching and learning in Kentucky high schools; however, it is possible that elementary and middle schools play an important and unrecognized role in the performance of Kentucky high schools.

However, it is possible that elementary and middle schools play an important and unrecognized role in the performance of Kentucky high schools. For example, it is possible that teaching methods used in some elementary and middle schools are sufficient to ensure that students demonstrate knowledge at the end of a particular school year but not sufficient to ensure that students recall and apply their knowledge as relevant to more advanced content. It is also possible that the assessments used at the different school levels are not of equal challenge relative to the range of student abilities and that students who attain a score of proficient

on a middle school assessment are not necessarily prepared with the skills necessary to master high school content at a proficient level. Thus, low proficiency rates in some high schools may be as reflective of students' prior teaching and learning as they are of the school's.[7]

Persistently Low-achieving Schools

Identification Methods

Of schools that have not met adequate yearly progress goals for 3 consecutive years, those with the lowest reading and mathematics proficiency rates are identified as persistently low achieving.

In March 2010, the General Assembly, in response to federal initiatives, passed House Bill 176, which outlined new methods for identifying persistently low-achieving schools. According to KRS 160.346(1)(a), a school will be identified persistently low achieving in 2010 and 2011 if, based on averaging the percentage of proficient and distinguished in reading and mathematics on state assessments, it is in the group "that contains a minimum of the lowest five (5) or the lowest five percent (5%), whichever is greater" of the schools that have failed to make AYP for 3 consecutive years. Calculations are performed to identify persistently low-achieving schools in three groups: 1) Title I schools, 2) middle and high schools that qualify for but do not receive Title I assistance, and 3) high schools with graduation rates of less than 60 percent for 3 consecutive years.[8] Beginning in 2012, schools will be identified based on their low performance in the new state accountability system. These methods are based on federal guidelines associated with the 1003(g) grants; however, federal guidelines provide states with the option to use additional identification criteria that adjust for change in scores over time or differences in proficiency rates among elementary, middle, and high schools.

[7]In a study of mathematics in 12 higher- and 5 lower-performing schools, OEA found that feeder school performance in all lower-performing middle and high schools was below state averages, whereas feeder school performance in all but 1 higher-performing high school was above state averages. The study also documented overwhelming concern among high school mathematics teachers about lack of prerequisite skills among many incoming freshmen, even those who had attained proficient math scores in 8th grade (Commonwealth. Legislative. Office. *Mathematics*).

[8]This definition applies through the 2011 school year only.

Characteristics of Identified Schools

To date, 20 schools have been identified as persistently low achieving: 10 in 2009 and 10 in 2010. With the exception of two middle schools identified in 2009, all are high schools.[9] OEA projects that as many as 21 schools could be identified as persistently low achieving in 2011 because a growing number of schools have not made AYP for 3 consecutive years.

The overwhelming majority of schools identified as persistently low achieving in 2009 and 2010 were high schools with especially low math proficiency rates. Of the 20 schools identified to date, 12 are in Jefferson County, 5 are in the eastern, 2 are in the southern central, and 1 is in the western part of the state.

The overwhelming majority of schools identified as low achieving in 2009 and 2010 were high schools with especially low math proficiency rates. The average math proficiency rate of the eight high schools identified as persistently low achieving in 2009 was 20.4 percent, and the average reading proficiency rate was 43.6 percent. The average math proficiency rate for the 10 high schools identified in 2010 was 24 percent, and the average reading proficiency rate was 44 percent.

Of the 20 schools identified to date, 12 are in Jefferson County, 5 are in the eastern part of the state, 2 are in the southern central part of the state, and 1 is in the western part of the state.

Consistent with data for chronically lowest-achieving schools reported earlier in this chapter, persistently low-achieving schools, on average, far exceed the state in percentages of students living in poverty and minority students. Of the 20 schools identified in 2009 and 2010, 18 have percentages of students living in poverty that exceed state averages and 15 have percentages of minority students that far exceed state averages.

Limitations of Current Identification Methods

While the current method will likely identify schools that are performing far below state averages, it may, in some cases, identify schools that experience a sudden drop in test scores in the identification year but were not previously among the state's lowest achievers.

Because high stakes and substantial federal funding are associated with each intervention option required for schools identified as persistently low achieving, it is especially important that the measures used to identify these schools are valid indicators of schools' needs for intensive intervention relative to others in the state. While the current method will likely identify schools that are

[9]The following schools were identified as persistently low achieving in 2009: Shawnee High School Magnet Career Academy, Western Middle School, Robert Frost Middle School, Western High School, Valley Traditional High School, Leslie County High School, Lawrence County High School, Metcalfe County High School, Caverna High School, and Fern Creek High School. The following high schools were identified as low achieving in 2010: East Carter County, Christian County, Greenup County, Iroquois, Doss, Fairdale, Waggener, Southern, Seneca, and Sheldon Clark.

performing far below state averages, it may not necessarily identify the lowest-achieving schools relative to the state's broad educational goals. In some cases, schools that experience a sudden drop in test scores in the identification year but were not previously among the state's lowest achievers might be identified. This is especially true for high schools because assessments are given in only one grade per subject and are likely to vacillate from year to year. Also, because the identification method is based on assessments in reading and mathematics only, it does not provide a comprehensive measure of student achievement; in some cases, identified schools may have major weaknesses in one subject only. Many of these concerns will likely be addressed in the development of the new accountability system required for implementation of 2009 SB 1.

Chapter 3

Assistance to Low-achieving Schools and Districts: Strengths, Limitations, and Continuing Challenges

Introduction

State assistance has been associated with dramatic gains in some schools but modest or no effects in others. Moving forward, policy makers should take into account lessons learned about the priority needs and unique challenges present in some of the state's lowest-achieving schools.

While assistance has been associated with dramatic gains in many schools, it appears to have had modest or no effects in others. Existing forms of assistance have been less effective in high schools and in schools facing deep, underlying challenges. While new forms of assistance proposed by KDE through District 180 may address some of the limitations of past assistance, alternative strategies may be necessary to address the priority needs and unique challenges present in many of the state's lowest-achieving schools. Attracting and retaining skilled teachers and leaders is one such challenge. Alternative strategies might also be needed to recognize the critical role played by districts and local school boards in improving low-achieving schools.

Organization of the Chapter

The chapter begins by describing priority needs of low-achieving schools. Next, achievement gains, strengths, and limitations associated with previous forms of assistance are discussed, along with initial concerns associated with current efforts to assist the state's persistently lowest-achieving schools. The chapter discusses the important roles of districts and local school boards in monitoring and improving low-achieving schools and districts. It concludes with recommendations for linking scholastic audits, assistance, and intervention in the state's new accountability system.

Data supporting the analyses in this chapter include previous research conducted within the Commonwealth and in the nation, staff analysis of KDE data, and interviews with 5 superintendents, 6 district staff, 6 principals, 14 teachers, 12 former highly skilled educators, 5 members of Voluntary Partnership Assistance Teams or Assist and Support School Improvement Success Teams, and directors of the Kentucky School Boards Association and Kentucky Association of School Superintendents. Staff interviewed equal numbers of practitioners with experience in schools that have improved following state assistance and practitioners with experience in schools that have not. Staff also analyzed district and school leadership assessments conducted by

KDE in connection with KRS 160.346, which requires identification of and intervention in the state's persistently low-achieving schools.

Priority Needs in Low-achieving Schools

Interview data, leadership assessments, and staffing data indicate priority needs of low-achieving schools in the areas of school leadership, culture, and, in some schools, staffing and student mobility.

Interview data, leadership assessments of persistently low-achieving schools, and staffing data indicate priority needs related to school leadership, culture, and, in some schools, staffing and student mobility. OEA interviews with KDE staff, superintendents, principals, teachers, and assistance providers strongly suggest that assistance directed at other areas such as curriculum, instruction, and assessment is likely to be effective only if it also able to address schools' priority needs.

School Leadership and School Culture

Most low-achieving schools lack the clear goals, supports, and monitoring systems established by effective school and district leaders. As a result, school culture in low-achieving schools is often characterized by disunity among faculty in their goals, beliefs, and instructional practices.

The overwhelming majority of practitioners interviewed for this study identified school leadership and culture as areas of priority need in low-achieving schools. Most low-achieving schools lack the clear goals, supports, and monitoring systems established by effective school and district leadership. As a result, school culture in low-achieving schools is often characterized by disunity among faculty in their goals, beliefs, and instructional practices. Faculty morale is often low as a result of this disunity, chronic low performance, years of successive, sometimes conflicting reform efforts, and perceived lack of support for chronic challenges. Chronic challenges include school discipline, high numbers of students needing supplemental academic support, and inconsistent expectations of staff from local leadership.

These observations are supported by previous research conducted in the Commonwealth. Strong leadership and collaborative cultures were key school characteristics identified in the Prichard Committee's study of high-performing high-poverty Kentucky schools (Kannapel and Clements). OEA identified common, high expectations and accountable, supportive school cultures as characteristics common to high-performing schools and lacking in low-achieving schools (Commonwealth. Legislative. Office. *Mathematics*).

School leadership assessments conducted by KDE in spring 2010 also identify the priority need of low-achieving schools for improvements in leadership and school culture.

School leadership assessments conducted by KDE in spring 2010 also identify the priority need of low-achieving schools for improvements in leadership and school culture. These audits found that, in 6 out of 10 schools, principals did not have the capacity to

lead the school improvement efforts. Audits indicated that all 10 schools lacked the accountable, positive school cultures necessary for high performance.

Effective leadership and teaching in low-achieving schools may require characteristics and training beyond what is needed in other schools.

Effective leadership and teaching in low-achieving schools may require characteristics and training beyond what is needed in other schools. The regulations associated with 2010 HB 176 (703 KAR 5:180) require that principals hired to lead low-achieving schools be specifically trained for that purpose.

Recruiting and Retaining Staff

Many low-achieving schools face chronic challenges recruiting and retaining teachers with the characteristics necessary to be successful with the school's students. These challenges may be especially great in highly populated areas such as Jefferson County.

Highly skilled educators who have worked in some of the state's persistently lowest-achieving schools describe chronic challenges faced by school principals in recruiting and retaining teachers with the characteristics necessary to be successful with the school's students. Persistently low-achieving schools often are not top choices for teacher applicants. Given the option, some staff leave these schools for higher-performing schools. These challenges may be especially great in highly populated areas such as Jefferson County that provide more options for teachers interested in transferring from low-achieving schools. Further, the Jefferson County Teachers Association contract may facilitate easy transfer of more experienced teachers by giving teachers with the greatest years of experience priority consideration for job openings in the district's schools. Appendix D provides data indicating higher percentages of new teachers and higher attrition rates in Jefferson County's persistently low-achieving schools.

Low-achieving schools in rural areas experience separate challenges recruiting staff to teach in remote locations. Staffing difficulties are prevalent in mathematics, the subject that presents the greatest challenge to many low-achieving schools.

Low-achieving schools located in rural areas experience separate challenges recruiting staff to teach in remote locations. If principals are not confident about their ability to recruit more effective replacements, they may be hesitant to take steps to remove ineffective teachers. Staffing difficulties are prevalent in mathematics, the subject that presents the greatest challenge to many low-achieving schools (Commonwealth. Legislative. Office. *Mathematics)*.

Student Mobility

National literature has established associations between student mobility and academic performance.

National literature has established associations between student mobility—the transfer of students from school to school for reasons other than grade promotion—and academic performance. This relationship reflects preexisting academic risk factors associated with mobile students, such as poverty. Student mobility can reflect the frequent moves of families searching for jobs or

affordable housing. It can also reflect challenges associated with student behavior and the tendency of some families to transfer students away from schools in which they are experiencing academic or social difficulty. However, mobility appears to exacerbate these risks by reducing the consistency of instruction and the social ties between communities and schools (Kerbow).

Some districts calculate student mobility rates for their own schools, but Kentucky does not have a consistent statewide student mobility measure. Student mobility rates in Jefferson County schools identified as persistently low achieving exceed district averages.

Some districts calculate student mobility rates for their own schools, but Kentucky does not have a consistent statewide student mobility measure. Mobility rates can be calculated at the district and school levels. District-level rates can be calculated by "adding all children who entered any school within the school district to all those who withdrew from any school in the district and dividing the total by the total enrollment for that school district" (Rhode Island). Another potential mobility measure, more accurately defined as an "in-mobility," requires dividing the number of new students who enter a school after the year has begun by the school's total enrollment (Salley). The Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education uses a comprehensive mobility calculation that includes "intake," "churn," and "stability." Intake is the same as "in-mobility," described above. Churn is the number of students who are mobile over the school year divided by the total number of students enrolled during the school year. Stability is "the total number of students enrolled during the school year divided by the number of students with days in membership in a district or school since the start of the school year" (O'Donnell).

Recommendation 3.1

Recommendation 3.1

The Kentucky Department of Education should consider determining a mobility rate methodology and collect the data necessary to calculate student mobility rates for all schools and districts. These measures should be incorporated into school and district report cards.

Highly Skilled Educator Program

Effects of Highly Skilled Educators on Student KCCT Performance

Research indicated that the Highly Skilled Educator program has had limited effect on student learning as measured by the KCCT.

Limited Performance Gains Across All Schools. Previous research as well as OEA staff analysis indicates that, on average, schools that have received assistance from highly skilled educators (HSEs) show modest or no performance gains compared to

similarly performing schools that have not received assistance. A 2009 report by the Legislative Research Commission's Program Review and Investigations Committee showed that, in school years 2003 to 2008, schools receiving assistance through a combination of HSE, Commonwealth School Improvement Fund grants, and scholastic audits or reviews showed 1-year improvements in accountability index scores of 3.7 points in 2003 and 2.6 points in 2005, compared to all Kentucky schools, but no statistically significant improvements in the remaining 4 years analyzed (Commonwealth. Legislative. Program. 2009 13). [1] A similar analysis by the Regional Educational Laboratory of Appalachia found modest gains of 2.6 in accountability index points associated with the HSE program. The report also noted absence of data that allow for rigorous program evaluation including the program's long-term effects (Hansen). A Partnership for Kentucky Schools study of the HSE program found performance gains of 4 accountability points associated with receiving HSE assistance (David). However, unlike the other studies mentioned, this study did not use methods that adjusted for the fact that, on average, the lowest-achieving schools are more likely to make gains that exceed the state's, whether or not they receive assistance.

The HSE program has been associated with greater gains in elementary schools than in middle and high schools.

School-level Gains. Closer examination of the data indicates that, on average, the HSE program has been associated with greater gains in elementary schools than in middle and high schools. OEA staff analyzed 2-year performance gains in the average reading and math scores of schools that received assistance from an HSE, compared to similarly performing schools that did not receive HSE assistance during the treatment years or in the 2 years prior. The analysis included data from two cohorts of schools receiving assistance from HSEs. The first received HSE assistance during the 2001 and 2002 school years, and the second received HSE assistance during the 2003 and 2004 school years. Effects of HSE assistance are difficult to analyze in subsequent years because KDE data do not distinguish between schools that received full- or part-time assistance from HSEs.

Figure 3.A shows gains made from 2000 to 2002 by schools in the lowest 10 percent of performance in 2000 as determined by the average of reading and math proficiency rates on the Kentucky

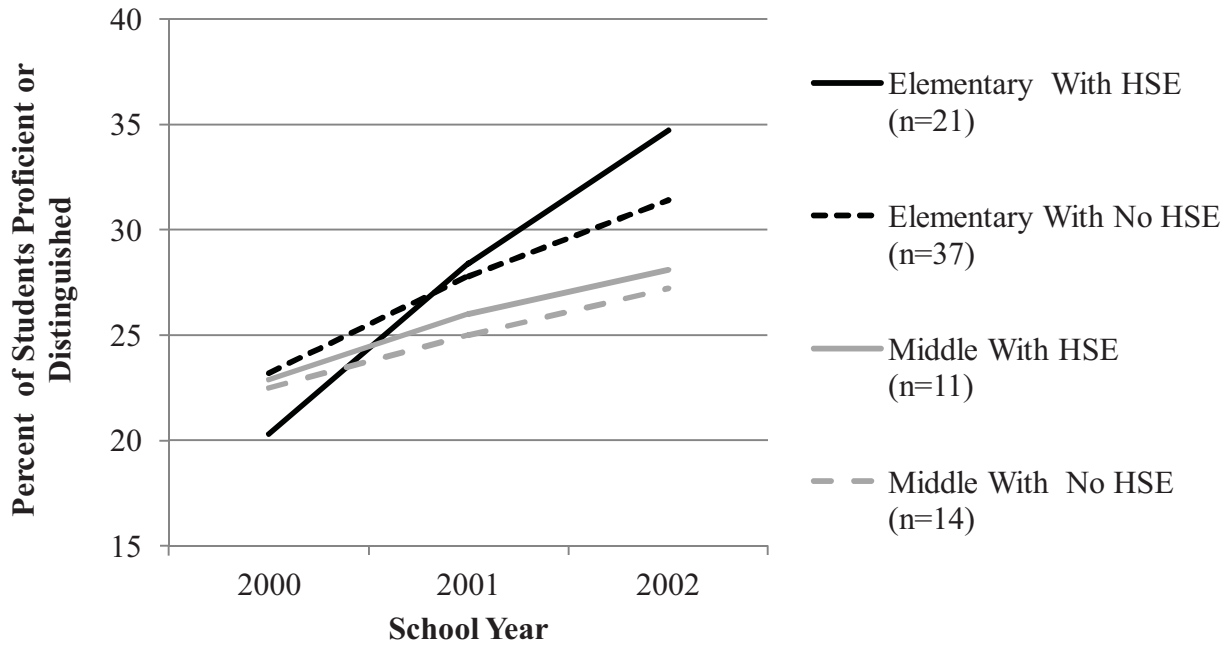
[1] Program Review's analysis found no statistically significant effects from HSE assistance alone. However, schools that received HSE assistance alone were less likely than other schools to receive intensive assistance from HSEs. HSEs were more likely to have been assigned full time to the schools falling in the bottom third of schools In Need of Assistance. These schools would have also received both audits and CSIF funding.

Core Content Test. The figure compares gains made by elementary and middle schools in the lowest 10 percent of performance in 2000 with and without HSEs during the 2001 and 2002 school years. Appendix E contains similar results for schools that received HSE assistance in 2003 and 2004. Most schools receiving assistance from HSEs were in the lowest 10 percent of schools (35 out of 49 in 2001 and 2002).

As the figure shows, elementary schools that were in the lowest 10 percent of schools in 2000 and had HSE assistance in 2001 and 2002 made gains that were 6.2 percentage points greater than elementary schools that were in the lowest 10 percent of performance in 2000 but had no HSE assistance. Middle schools that were in the lowest 10 percent of performance in 2000 and had HSE assistance in 2001 and 2002 made gains that were similar to those made by middle schools that were in the lowest 10 percent of performance in 2000 but had no HSE assistance.[2] Gains made by high schools in the lowest 10 percent of performance in 2000 are not reported in the table because there were only three that received HSE assistance in 2001 and 2002. Those 3 schools made gains of 1.3 percentage points, compared to 4.6 percentage points by the 18 other high schools that were in the lowest 10 percent. The limitations of this analysis are discussed later in this chapter.

[2]Of the 11 middle schools, 3 received assistance in 2001 or 2002 only.

Figure 3.A
Impact of Highly Skilled Educators on Reading and Mathematics Performance of Schools in Lowest 10 Percent



Note: This analysis includes only those schools that were in the lowest 10 percent of schools in 2000 as measured by the percentage of students who were proficient or distinguished in reading and math combined. The figure compares performance of schools that received assistance from HSEs in 2001 and 2002 and those that received no HSE assistance.
Source: Staff analysis of data from the Kentucky Department of Education.

Continuing Low Achievement in Many HSE-assisted Schools. Many schools remain low achieving despite HSE assistance. Of the schools that were in the lowest 10 percent of performance for reading and math on the KCCT in 2009, 36 percent of elementary schools, 63 percent of middle schools, and 46 percent of high schools had received assistance from HSEs in the last decade. Of the 27 schools identified as chronically low achieving in Chapter 2, 16 have had HSE assistance, most for more than 4 years and some for as many as 8 years. Of the 16 schools that are chronically low achieving despite HSE assistance, 13 are middle or high schools and 12 are located in urban districts. These data reinforce concerns that assistance similar to what has been provided through HSEs may have limited effects in many middle schools, high schools, and schools in urban districts.

Strengths and Limitations of HSE Assistance

The HSE program appears to have been most successful when it has helped to build strong local leadership for accountable and supportive school cultures. HSEs assisted principals to work with staff in setting expectations and establishing systems and structures to support them.

HSE Assistance Can Strengthen School Leadership. Interview data indicate that the HSE program has been most successful when it has helped to build strong local leadership for accountable and supportive school cultures. HSEs reported greatest success building local leadership when they were able to work collaboratively with principals. They assisted principals to work with staff in setting expectations and establishing systems and structures to support them. For example, HSEs worked with principals to establish teacher leader teams focused on curriculum, assessment, and instruction. HSEs also worked collaboratively with principals and teachers on school attendance policies and programs designed to raise student morale. In these cases, principals were both willing and able to adopt practices introduced by the HSEs. Some HSEs were successful even without initial support from principals because the majority of the faculty were willing to examine existing practice and work together even if they had not done so in the past.

HSEs are unlikely to be successful when working with principals or school councils that are unwilling to support or sustain improvement efforts.

HSE Impact Limited Without Local Leadership Support. HSEs are unlikely to be successful when working with principals or school councils that are unwilling to support or sustain improvement efforts. Many low-achieving schools have splintered cultures in which faculty cluster in social or departmental groups that are not supportive of and even undermine each other's efforts. HSEs are trained to address these cultural challenges. However, some acknowledge it can be difficult to change splintered cultures absent accountability for staff that are uncomfortable with or resistant to change.[3] Changes to instructional programs or expectations of staff are difficult and can be easily derailed in schools with conflicting messages from administrators and strong pockets of resistance among faculty.

Some principals are uncomfortable supporting improvement efforts that require setting, monitoring, and enforcing substantial changes in expectations for teachers and students. Improvement plans are likely to be especially controversial if they require reallocation of staffing positions. Staffing challenges may be more prevalent in high schools.

Some principals are uncomfortable supporting improvement efforts that require setting, monitoring, and enforcing substantial changes in expectations for teachers and students. These changes may begin with increased observation of and interaction with staff about instructional practices. In some cases, improvement efforts might lead to corrective action plans and termination of staff unwilling or unable to improve their practices. Personnel decisions may be more challenging at the high school level because of school size

[3]OEA data are not sufficient to determine the nature of staff resistance to HSE improvement efforts. OEA acknowledges that staff may have legitimate reservations about improvement efforts based either on their own pedagogical convictions or on experience with conflicting reform efforts in the past.

and the discomfort on the part of some principals in addressing subject-specific instructional issues. Improvement plans are likely to be especially controversial if they require staffing changes. For example, a school with low math proficiency rates may require an additional math teacher in order to offer the full range of courses necessary to meet students' needs. In such a case, the school-based decision making council would have to be supportive of the change. Elementary schools are more likely than high schools to be able to shift focus among instructional areas without requiring staffing changes.

Support of local leaders is necessary for improvement efforts that increase expectations and accountability for students.

The support of the principal, superintendent, and local school board is also critical for improvement efforts that increase expectations and accountability for students. For example, improving math proficiency rates at the high school level requires establishment of consistent, high expectations for student performance on homework and on tests. Expectations that require extra work or that withdraw privileges, such as participation in athletics, can be controversial among students, staff, and parents and therefore demand full support from local leaders.

In the past, KDE has not been able to match every school with the most appropriately trained HSE.

HSE Hiring and Assignment Process Impacts Success. HSEs are also more likely to be successful when they have the skills, experience, and content knowledge suitable for a particular school. In the past, KDE has not been able to match every school with the most appropriately trained HSE. Because HSEs are hired before schools are identified for assistance, they do not always possess relevant content or grade level experience. Also, KDE has not received sufficient numbers of HSE applicants in high-need areas, such as high school mathematics.

HSEs noted limited effects of assignments that were short in duration. HSEs must become acquainted with a school's unique challenges, build trust among faculty, and initiate and implement needed changes. This process takes longer in some schools than in others. In recent years, some HSEs have been assigned to multiple schools. HSEs are often reassigned in the fall when assessment scores indicate that a school does not qualify for assistance.

The HSE program is not designed to address systemic challenges associated with recruiting and retaining school staff or lack of community support for high academic expectations.

HSE Impact Limited in Schools With Systemic Challenges. The HSE program is not designed to address systemic challenges such as recruitment and retention of school staff or highly mobile student populations. In schools facing these challenges, progress made by HSEs in addressing the challenges of these populations could be quickly undermined by teacher attrition or student mobility in future years. The HSE program is also less likely to

have an effect on schools in districts in which there is not strong community support for increasing academic expectations.

District 180 Addresses Some But Not All Limitations of HSE Program

The District 180 model may increase effectiveness of assistance in those schools in which the primary limitation of the HSE program was the number or function of the staff assigned. However, the model may have limited impact in schools with underlying challenges.

Some but not all of the limits of school-based assistance provided by HSEs may be addressed by new forms of assistance provided to persistently low-achieving schools through District 180. This model intensifies school-based support to schools and places emphasis on assistance to the principal as well as assistance to teachers. In the past, most schools received assistance from a single HSE. HSEs in large schools, especially high schools, struggled to meet the needs of all staff. In the new District 180 model, schools would likely have three school-based assisters: an education recovery leader to assist the principal and two education recovery specialists to support instructional improvements. This model may increase the effectiveness of assistance in those schools in which the primary limitation of the HSE program was the number or function of the staff assigned. For example, the District 180 model makes it more likely that schools will receive assistance from educators with expertise in supporting both reading and mathematics instruction.

It is less likely that the District 180 model will address underlying challenges such as recruitment of teachers and leaders, student mobility, and lack of community support for increased expectations for students and staff. These challenges can be met only through cooperative efforts with district administrators and local school boards.

Possible Benefits of HSE Program Beyond Schools Receiving HSE Assistance

The majority of former HSEs interviewed for this study noted the value of their HSE training and experience in preparing them for subsequent leadership roles.

The majority of former HSEs interviewed for this study noted the value of their HSE training and experience in preparing them for subsequent leadership roles. Among the 298 HSEs or distinguished educators for which there are data, 66 have held positions as principals or assistant principals, 29 as superintendents and assistant superintendents, and 26 as KDE leaders including associate and interim commissioners.[4] While many HSEs return to positions they held prior to the program, including leadership positions, the majority of HSEs advance in rank after exiting the program. OEA interviewed several HSEs that held leadership

[4]Other frequently reported positions include instructional coaches, teachers, consultants, and retirement.

positions prior to the program but felt better prepared to hold similar leadership positions after the program. HSEs also stressed the value in their current leadership positions of social connections formed with other HSEs and sustained through the program's technology platform. HSEs and former HSEs rely on each other for strategies and suggestions both during and after their placement in schools. HSEs interviewed by staff of LRC's Program Review and Investigations committee also reported many of these benefits (Commonwealth. Legislative. Program. *Highly.* 2007).

According to KDE staff and to HSEs interviewed by OEA for this study, the value of the training and support provided through the HSE program is a combined product of the training provided and the quality of staff typically selected to enter the HSE program. HSE candidates are chosen through a selective process that requires evidence of past performance and potential for leadership. Several HSEs reported that they gained as much from immersion in a highly motivated and effective peer group as they did from the training itself. KDE staff and HSEs expressed doubt that the HSE training and network approach would have similar impact on those lacking a previous record of success with students and with peer leadership.

Scholastic Audits of Schools

Effects of Audits on Student KCCT Performance

It is unlikely that scholastic audits alone would be sufficient to spur improvement in low-achieving schools.

It is difficult to isolate effects of scholastic audits on subsequent school improvements. However, given the discussion above about the limited impact of HSEs in many schools, it is unlikely that scholastic audits alone would be sufficient to spur improvement in most low-achieving schools. A 2009 report by LRC's Program Review and Investigations Committee found no statistically significant impact of school audits alone in most of the 2003-2009 school years. Schools receiving audits alone showed improvements of 2.9 points in their accountability index scores in 2007 but in none of the other years analyzed (Commonwealth. Legislative. Program. *Highly*. 2009).

Strengths and Limitations of Scholastic Audits

Practitioners generally agreed with the accuracy of audit findings in low-achieving schools but questioned whether the audit process itself was sufficient to spur needed changes.

Practitioners generally agreed with the accuracy of audit findings in low-achieving schools but questioned whether the audit process itself was sufficient to spur needed changes. In the absence of strong leadership, for example, audits can receive short-term

attention and become lost in the many initiatives likely to be introduced in low-achieving schools.

Scholastic audits do not include data on several key characteristics related to priority needs in many low-achieving schools. Thus, while scholastic audits may identify important improvement goals, they may omit or fail to explicitly address other critical and more immediate needs.

Scholastic audits do not include data on several key characteristics related to priority needs in many low-achieving schools. These include

- the principal holds staff accountable for persistently falling short of expectations for instruction, relationships with students, parents, and other teachers.[5]
- the school has access to staff qualified to succeed in the school environment.
- the school is able to retain qualified staff who have employment opportunities in schools with better working conditions, geographic locations, or salaries.
- the district leadership supports steps necessary to raise expectations for staff and students.

Thus, while scholastic audits may identify important improvement goals, they may omit or fail to explicitly address other critical and immediate needs. In some cases, factors impacting student success, such as student mobility, teacher turnover, or lack of community support for difficult changes, may not even appear in the scholastic audit. This chapter will discuss revisions in the scholastic audit process, including attention to the important role of local school boards in supporting school improvement.

School Improvement Grants

Effects of Commonwealth School Improvement Fund Grants

A 2009 Legislative Research Commission report found little association between CSIF grants and school improvement.

A 2009 LRC report from the Program Review and Investigations Committee found little association between Commonwealth School Improvement Fund grants and school improvement. The report analyzed accountability index performance gains for the school years 2003 through 2008 in schools that received CSIF grants but received neither assistance from an HSE nor an audit. The report found performance gains of 1.6 accountability points in 2004 but no statistically significant effects in 2003, 2005, and 2006. The authors acknowledged limitations of the analysis similar to those described in this chapter. However, the report does raise concerns that CSIF funds alone may not promote broader

[5]This behavior is implied but not directly addressed in audit criteria such as 6.2C, 6.2d, and 6.2 f. It is possible to read a scholastic audit yet not have direct data on this point, which is widely held by teachers and principals interviewed by OEA to be a critical component of school improvement.

improvements in low-achieving schools (Commonwealth. Legislative. Program. *Highly.* 2009).

Effects of Title I School Improvement Grants

Title I schools receiving two simultaneous school improvement grants in 2008 and 2009 improved at a rate that fell short of the state average.

OEA staff analysis of performance gains in schools receiving school improvement grants through NCLB raised similar concerns. Thirty-six Kentucky schools received two simultaneous grants in the both the 2008 and 2009 school years: one grant through the ESEA 1003(a) fund for schools that have not made adequate yearly progress for at least 2 consecutive years, and a larger grant through the 1003(g) fund for schools that have not made AYP for 5 or more years. Schools receiving these two grants improved at a rate that was less than the state average. The percentage of students scoring proficient or distinguished in reading and mathematics increased by 4.3 percentage points between 2007 and 2009, compared to an increase of 6.4 percentage points in all Kentucky schools. Only seven of the schools receiving both NCLB grants improved enough to make AYP in either 2008 or 2009. This analysis does not necessarily demonstrate lack of effects associated with the NCLB improvement grants, but it does raise questions about whether substantial improvement grants alone lead to desired performance gains.

Limitations and Strengths of CSIF Grants

OEA interview data raise concerns about the limitations of CSIF and NCLB grants in addressing priority needs of low-achieving schools.

OEA interview data raise concerns about the limitations of school improvement grants in addressing priority needs of low-achieving schools. While practitioners interviewed for this study favored continued funding to support improvements for low-achieving schools, they acknowledged limitations to existing short-term state and federal school improvement grants.

School improvement grants add to administrative burdens, have restrictions in allowable expenditures, and are difficult to link with sustainable strategies. Superintendents and principals cited administrative challenges associated with writing and implementing grants that were aligned with priority needs and existing efforts at the school. Grant writing is time consuming. In some cases, personnel responsible for writing and managing grants may not be those most intimately involved in school leadership.

Funds are often used to purchase professional development, software, and other programs that add to the number of initiatives undertaken in low-achieving schools without necessarily addressing some of the basic challenges associated with school leadership, culture, and staffing.

Individual grant criteria for goals and admissible expenditures do not always align with schools' priority needs. District and school administrators, HSEs, and teachers interviewed for this study noted that grant funds are often used to purchase professional development, software, and other instructional programs. These add to the number of initiatives undertaken in low-achieving schools without necessarily addressing some of the basic challenges associated with school leadership, culture, and staffing. Because of the temporary nature of grant funding, it is more likely that grants will be used to purchase programs than to address chronic staffing needs. Schools that use grant funding to purchase staffing such as intervention teachers will face challenges sustaining their efforts when grant funding ends. Several HSEs described schools that were struggling to spend grant dollars yet were also unable to meet basic needs for a qualified, stable teaching staff.

Funds are likely used more effectively in schools that have already made key improvements than they are in schools with persistent leadership and culture needs.

OEA did interview several HSEs who described use of CSIF funding to support what they felt were priority needs. However, these HSEs acknowledged that effective use of CSIF funds was likely contingent on changes in school leadership and culture that had already occurred at the school; funds may not have otherwise been used as effectively. It is possible that grant expenditures are subject to a catch-22 logic in which funds are used effectively by schools that have already made key improvements but are not used effectively in schools with persistent leadership and culture needs.

It is difficult to monitor effective use of grant funding; financial accounting alone does not indicate effective use of funds to address priority needs.

Finally, KDE does not have staff sufficient to fully monitor implementation of CSIF funds. Following recommendations made by the Program Review and Investigations Committee in its 2007 report, KDE now compiles annual reports describing CSIF grant expenditures (Commonwealth. Legislative. Program. *Highly.* 2007). However, KDE staff members acknowledged that this financial accounting alone does not ensure effective use of CSIF funds to address priority needs (Sugg).

Recommendation 3.2

Recommendation 3.2

The General Assembly should consider continuing to permit the commissioner of education, through budget language, to use funds appropriated for Commonwealth School Improvement Grants to provide support to schools identified for assistance.

Limitations of the Analysis

To date, intervention and assistance programs have not been studied using methods that allow researchers to isolate program effects from the array of factors influencing performance in low-achieving schools. Therefore, existing research, including the OEA analysis presented in this chapter, should be interpreted with caution.

Existing research on the effects of interventions, including the OEA analysis presented in this chapter, should be interpreted with caution. To date, intervention and assistance programs have not been studied using methods that allow researchers to isolate program effects from the array of factors influencing performance in low-achieving schools. Most low-achieving schools are targeted for a variety of intervention and assistance efforts. In some cases, schools targeted for intervention may also be facing sanctions through the No Child Left Behind Act. Low-achieving schools labeled as In Need of Assistance in Kentucky are also more likely to receive support and be subject to performance pressure by district administrators. Therefore, effects associated with a particular intervention may be attributable to other interventions or performance pressures.

In addition, frequent program changes make it difficult to link particular programs with school outcomes. The nature of state and federal assistance has changed frequently over the last decade, as have the assessments used to measure student learning and the accountability models used to monitor schools. The focus and intensity within single programs have also changed. For example, beginning in 2004, some HSEs were assigned to many schools on a part-time basis for targeted assistance, whereas other HSEs spent the majority of their time in a single school. KDE records did not indicate the amount of assistance received by each school. The requirements of CSIF expenditures have also varied. Beginning in 2003 and 2004, CSIF funds were to be used specifically to reduce achievement gaps among student subgroups, but in 2005 funds could again be used to pursue broader improvement goals (Commonwealth. Legislative. Program. *Highly.* 2007). As a result of frequent program changes, the sample of schools receiving particular types of interventions is often quite small. This makes it more challenging to calculate the statistical significance of any one intervention.

Multiple measures of performance that include both qualitative and quantitative data are necessary to develop valid indicators of progress that align with Kentucky's broader educational goals.

Finally, while state assessments provide the only reliable indicator of assistance effects, they do not measure the comprehensive effects of assistance. Achievement gains in schools that have received assistance may reflect both intended and unintended effects. Unintended effects include narrowing of the curriculum, excessive test practice, or concentration of instructional resources on those students close to but not yet meeting performance goals. In other cases, there may be unmeasured positive effects that are not reflected in state assessment data. A previous study of the HSE

program noted lack of correlation, in some cases, between important gains indicated by qualitative data and gains on the CATS accountability index (David). Multiple measures of performance that include both qualitative and quantitative data are necessary to develop valid indicators of progress that align with Kentucky's broader educational goals.

Given uncertainty in Kentucky as well as the nation about the effects of previous assistance efforts on low-achieving schools, policy makers should expect closer examination of the short- and long-term effects of different strategies relative to the costs of those strategies.

Given uncertainty in Kentucky as well as the nation about the effects of previous assistance efforts in low-achieving schools, policy makers should expect closer examination of the short- and long-term effects of different strategies relative to the costs of those strategies. However, assistance programs have not traditionally been implemented in ways that allow for rigorous evaluation. Limitations of past evaluations include lack of detailed record keeping about the specific nature of interventions in particular schools and lack of valid comparison groups (Commonwealth. Legislative. Program. *Highly.* 2007; Hansen).

Investments in the future should be linked to specific evaluation models such as random assignment of schools to interventions. It may be preferable to allocate resources in a way that allows for better evaluation rather than to spread resources thin and compromise program effects.

Investments in the future should be linked to specific evaluation models such as random assignment of schools to interventions. While random assignment of interventions would require some qualifying schools to go without assistance, it would allow for better evaluation of program effects and might also allow for fuller implementation of intervention models. According to KDE staff, the number of schools that qualified for HSE assistance often exceeded program funding for full implementation of the model in every school. As a result, resources have sometimes been stretched thin and may have compromised program effects (Lester).[6] It may be preferable to allocate resources in a way that allows for better evaluation rather than to spread resources thin and compromise program effects.

Recommendation 3.3

Recommendation 3.3

The General Assembly should consider linking future funding for assistance to low-achieving schools and districts with requirements for program development and implementation that allow for rigorous evaluation using multiple measures and, if possible, random assignment. Program evaluation should include both quantitative and qualitative measures.

[6]According to a 2003 report, Kentucky served a higher percentage of schools through state assistance than did other states with similar programs (Mintrop).

Intervention Options for Persistently Low-achieving Schools

It is too early to assess the effects of interventions in persistently low-achieving schools

It is too early to assess the effects of the intervention options required by KRS 160.346 as they are in their first year of implementation. Judging from early indications, however, OEA has identified some possible benefits as well as concerns about the implementation of these options.

Leadership Assessments and Intervention Options Chosen

Of the 10 schools identified based on 2009 assessment data, 6 schools—all in Jefferson County—are implementing the restaffing option, and the remaining 4 schools are implementing the transformation option. Council authority to manage interventions was removed in 8 of the 10 identified schools.

Of the 10 schools identified based on 2009 assessment data, 6 schools—all in Jefferson County—are implementing the restaffing option, and the remaining 4 schools are implementing the transformation option. After leadership audits conducted by KDE, the Commissioner recommended removal of the authority of school councils to manage the interventions in 8 out of 10 schools, with the authority granted to the district in all but one of these schools. Authority to manage the intervention was granted to the Commissioner in one school. Appendix F contains data on results of leadership audits and of intervention options chosen by districts for persistently low-achieving schools.

While KRS 160.345 requires principal removal for implementation of all options, only 5 of the 10 principals were removed. Districts took advantage of flexibility in federal guidelines to retain principals who were hired after July 2007.

All of the intervention options outlined in KRS 160.346 require removal of the existing school principal. However, principals in only 5 of the 10 schools have been removed. Districts are taking advantage of flexibility provided through federal requirements for the 1003(g) grants. These requirements allow funding for schools that have implemented in whole or part any of the intervention during the 2 years prior to identification. In keeping with this guidance, schools were allowed to retain principals who had been hired after July 7, 2007.[7] The regulation that corresponds with KRS 160.346—703 KAR 5:180E—does allow principals to remain in persistently low-achieving schools when leadership assessments find them to have capacity to lead the school. However, only three of the five principals who have been retained in low-achieving schools were found to have capacity in leadership assessments.

[7]OEA staff have some concerns about some misalignment between KRS.160.346 and federal guidance for the 1003(g) grants. Staff also have some concerns about the criteria used to make determinations of school councils' capacity to manage the interventions. OEA is working with KDE staff to address these concerns.

Of the six schools implementing the restaffing option, only three retained no more than 50 percent of existing staff. The remaining requested that staffing changes be calculated after July 2007 because some of the required interventions had already been implemented.

Restaffing. The restaffing option requires that schools screen all existing staff for their potential to be successful in the school environment and retain no more than 50 percent of staff for the following school year. Table 3.1 shows the percentage of staff new to each school that implemented the restaffing option. Only three of the six schools met the restaffing criteria for new staff as of July 2010. The remaining three met the restaffing criteria for new staff as of July 2007. Jefferson County submitted documentation to the Commissioner of Education stating that the district had already initiated dramatic changes at Shawnee, Western, Valley, and Fern Creek High Schools. In accordance with federal guidance associated with the 1003(g) grants, restaffing percentages can be calculated as of July 2007 for schools that had implemented in whole or part any components of the interventions required by the 1003(g) grants. However, this flexibility is not reflected in KRS 160.346.

Table 3.1
Percentage of Instructional Staff New to School Following Initiation of Restaffing Option in Jefferson County Schools

	New to School After July 1, 2007	New to School After July 1, 2010
Fern Creek High School	66%	41%
Robert Frost Middle School	87	66
Shawnee High School	90	55
Valley Traditional High School	63	30
Western Middle School	89	64
Western High School	82	40

Source: Staff analysis of personnel data from the Jefferson County Public Schools.

Further monitoring and evaluation are necessary to determine the degree to which interventions are being implemented and leading to improvements in the identified schools.

Transformation. The four schools that chose the transformation option have submitted grant applications detailing the steps they will take to meet federal guidelines, which are described in Appendix B. Guidelines specify required actions in such areas as extended learning time, use of evaluation systems that take into account data on student growth, identification and reward of teachers deemed to be effective by these evaluations, and removal of teachers found to be ineffective by these evaluations after those teachers have been provided ample opportunities to improve their practice. These grant applications are posted on KDE's website. Further monitoring and evaluation are necessary to determine the degree to which these actions are being implemented and leading to improvements in the identified schools.

Barriers to Improving Persistently Low-Achieving Schools

The restaffing option may not be effective in schools that have difficulty attracting qualified teachers.

Inexperience of New Hires. The success of the restaffing model rests on the ability of newly hired staff to be more effective than staff that are not rehired. This theory assumes an available supply of teachers and other staff who are qualified to be successful and are willing to work in low-achieving schools. Research suggests that, on average, new teachers are less effective than more experienced teachers and that the relationship between teachers' experience and their effectiveness is greatest in the first few years of teaching (Rice).

A high percentage of new hires in restaffed schools are teacher interns or teachers with less than 3 years of teaching experience.

Table 3.2 shows the percentage in restafffed schools of newly hired staff that are known to have more than 3 years of teaching experience as well as the percentage of newly hired staff that are interns, meaning that they are in their probational first year of teaching in Kentucky schools. The table shows that an average of 31 percent of the new hires in restaffed schools are teacher interns. At Frost Middle School, a particularly high percentage (58 percent) of the new hires are teacher interns. OEA was not able to obtain detailed records for all staff hired in the restaffed schools; however, preliminary analysis indicated that, among all restaffed schools, less than 20 percent of the new hires were known to have more than 3 years of teaching experience. These data raise concerns about whether the restaffing option has increased the ability of school staff to meet the learning needs of the schools' students.

Table 3.2
Teaching Experience of Instructional Staff Hired to Restaffed Schools After July 1, 2010*

School	Percentage of New Hires Known to Have More Than 3 Years of Teaching Experience**	Percentage of New Hires That Are Interns***
Fern Creek	16%	19%
Robert Frost Middle	4	58
Shawnee High	38	3
Western Middle	16	39
Western High	19	37
Valley High	25	46
Totals, all six schools	20	31

*OEA staff analyzed data for new hires made in July 2010, after required implementation of the restaffing model. However, some schools included staff hired after July 2007 to meet the requirements of the restaffing option.
**OEA staff were not able to obtain years of teaching experience for 44 percent of the new hires. The actual percentage of new hires that have more than 3 years of teaching experience is likely higher than what is reported in this table, especially in Shawnee and Fern Creek High Schools. Staff were able to obtain years of experience for less than 50 percent of the new hires in those schools.
***Interns are teachers that are in their probational first year of teaching.
Source: Staff analysis of personnel data from the Jefferson County Public Schools.

OEA staff experienced considerable difficulty accessing data sufficient to determine compliance with the restaffing requirements. Difficulties are associated with differences among data sources in the staff included and differences in the months during which data are typically available.

Schools facing sanctions may have greater difficulty retaining staff.

Staff Retention. It is not yet known whether the restaffed schools will experience challenges retaining their newly hired staff. However, national research suggests that sanctions can exacerbate existing staffing challenges in low-achieving schools. Teachers are more likely to leave schools that may face consequences as a result of being identified as low achieving (Feng). Transfer provisions of the Jefferson County Teachers Association contract may make it easier for teachers with experience to transfer out of low-achieving schools by guaranteeing them positions in other district schools.

Other schools in the district may be forced to hire teachers who are not rehired at persistently low-achieving schools. According to district leadership, it is very difficult to remove ineffective teachers from the teaching pool.

Effect of Restaffing on Other District Schools. In Jefferson County, teachers removed from restaffed schools are eligible to fill vacancies posted in other district schools and have contractual rights to fill these positions based on their years of teaching experience. According to district leadership, it is very difficult to remove ineffective teachers from the teaching pool. Thus, some teachers found to be ineffective will be transferred to other schools

in the district. On the other hand, some teachers found to be ineffective in persistently low-achieving schools may experience greater success in other school environments (Berman).

Schools identified as persistently low achieving as well as schools that may be identified as persistently low achieving in the future may be under increased pressure to focus on reading and mathematics at the expense of other subjects.

Pressure To Narrow Instruction to Tested Subjects. Schools identified as persistently low achieving as well as schools that may be identified as persistently low achieving in the future may be under increased pressure to focus on reading and mathematics at the expense of other subjects because reading and mathematics assessment data are used exclusively to identify low-achieving schools.

Potential Benefits to Low-achieving Schools

Schools identified as persistently low achieving likely have received more attention from the media and from local leaders than they may have otherwise. However, attention of local leaders and media would have to be sustained over many years to ensure benefits to identified schools.

Attention of Local Leaders. Following identification as persistently low achieving, schools likely have received more attention from the media and from local leaders than they may have otherwise. The Louisville *Courier Journal* published a series of articles that followed six Jefferson County schools through the identification process, implementation of options, and updates to the Jefferson County school board. Progress at Shawnee High School is being followed by a national education publication. As a result of media attention and of attention focused on district leadership by KDE district audits, it is likely that local leaders are facing deeper and more sustained questions about their efforts to improve school performance than they might have otherwise. In order to get federal funds associated with the interventions, district leaders must also complete grants detailing the improvement plans at each school. However, attention of local leaders and media would have to be sustained over many years to ensure benefits to identified schools.

Schools identified as persistently low-achieving in 2009 are receiving more intensive assistance from KDE staff than has been provided to low-achieving schools in the past.

District 180 Support Staff. Schools identified as persistently low achieving are receiving more intensive assistance from KDE staff than has been provided to any low-achieving Kentucky schools in the past. Most identified schools are receiving school-based assistance from an education recovery leader and two education recovery specialists. In addition, regional education recovery directors are coordinating assistance from a variety of providers. However, this assistance will not be available through state funding for the group of schools implementing intervention options in 2012. Districts may elect to include District 180 staff in their intervention plans if they use 1003(g) grant funds or other funds to pay for them.

School-based assistance provided by District 180 staff will likely have some of the same limitations as the HSE program in schools that have systemic underlying problems. For example, staff may experience challenges building a cohesive school culture in those schools that have faced large teacher turnovers and high numbers of new teachers.

Schools may receive large grants of up to $1.5 million over 3 years to support improvements.

Increased Funding. Persistently low-achieving schools are eligible for up to $500,000 annually for 3 years through the federal 1003(g) grants. Staff analysis of grants submitted for these schools indicate that funds will be used for a range of purposes such as additional staffing, professional development, and instructional resources. OEA expects that CSIF and NCLB school improvement grants may support improvement efforts in schools that are making strides in school leadership and culture. However, the grants' effects may be limited in schools that are not experiencing these strides. Effects may also be limited in schools facing systemic and ongoing challenges, such as recruitment and retention of teachers or lack of community support for difficult changes.

Role of Districts in Improving Low-achieving Schools

Superintendents and district administrative staff play a critical, often overlooked role in improving low-achieving schools. In some districts, superintendents and district staff, with the support of local school boards, take an active role in monitoring and supporting schools and holding staff accountable for high standards of practice. However, low-achieving schools often lack sufficient attention and support from district offices.

Need for Greater District Monitoring, Support, and Accountability

Superintendents and district staff can play a key role in ensuring that school leadership and cultures are focused on student learning. Leadership audits identified greater need for district accountability and support for low-achieving schools.

All five district audits conducted by KDE in connection with persistently low-achieving schools identified greater need for accountability and support from district leadership. Superintendents and district staff can play a key role in ensuring that school leadership and cultures are focused on student learning. Audits recommended increased roles for district staff in setting high expectations for student achievement and monitoring expectations through achievement data as well as observation of instructional practices. Audits emphasized the role of district leaders in holding both principals and teachers accountable for progress toward higher goals. All five audits also indicated a greater need for district staff to provide support to principals and

teachers in low-achieving schools. Several audits recommended reorganization of district staff to ensure sufficient support for low-achieving schools.

Teachers and administrators in many low-achieving schools noted a lack of district presence and support. Some teachers wondered whether district administrators might be turning a blind eye to certain pressing school needs.

OEA interview data also suggest a need for greater monitoring and support of low-achieving schools in many districts. Teachers and administrators in many low-achieving schools noted a lack of district presence and support. Some teachers wondered whether district administrators might be turning a blind eye to certain pressing school needs. For example, some schools develop a reputation as being "dumping grounds" for teachers who have been urged to leave other schools.

Lack of sustained district attention to and support of low-achieving schools may also reflect discomfort on the part of district staff in pushing for changes that may be controversial with school staff or local communities.

Lack of sustained district attention to and support of low-achieving schools may reflect discomfort on the part of district staff in pushing for changes that are controversial with school staff or local communities. In some cases, district staff may not have the training or experience necessary to assist staff in low-achieving schools. These concerns are supported by data collected in previous OEA reports. For example, small districts may not have staff that are comfortable leading instructional change in all areas. High school mathematics can be especially challenging (Commonwealth. Legislative. Office. *Mathematics)*.

Some superintendents and local school boards believe that school councils bear primary responsibility for school improvement.

Lack of district attention to low-achieving schools may also reflect a perception by superintendents that school councils bear primary responsibility for school improvement. Interviewees noted that some superintendents and local school boards perceived a reduction in both their authority and their responsibility as a result of the Kentucky Education Reform Act. The act gave local school councils substantial authority in such areas as curriculum, assessment, and staffing. Superintendents expressed frustration at their inability to choose principals for low-achieving schools. Superintendents argued that, while school councils have statutory authority to hire principals, councils in low-achieving schools may not be suited to this role. Superintendents were concerned that teachers, in particular, may be reluctant to hire principals who are likely to increase expectations for teacher performance.

Recruiting and Retaining Staff

KDE's audit of Jefferson County schools called for a greater role for district leadership in ensuring that schools are "staffed with experienced, effective teaching and administrative staff" and in reducing the rate of teacher turnover.

KDE's audit of Jefferson County schools called for a greater role for district leadership in ensuring that schools are "staffed with experienced, effective teaching and administrative staff" and in reducing the rate of teacher turnover (Commonwealth. Department. *Jefferson* 69). Staff assignment and teacher turnover are systemic and continuing challenges facing persistently low-achieving schools in Jefferson County. According to KDE staff, the district has long had the opportunity to use Title I and other funds to experiment with incentive pay for teachers in hard-to-staff schools but has not seriously pursued this option (Sugg).

The district is currently pursuing a strategy designed to improve teacher recruitment and retention by improving school working conditions.

The district has recently introduced a new strategy, funded in part through the federal Investing in Innovation fund, to recruit and retain teachers in low-achieving schools. This strategy focuses on improving leadership and teacher working conditions. District leaders said these factors will have more impact on schools' ability to attract and retain high-quality teachers than other strategies, such as incentive pay for hard-to-staff schools. The district could have used the substantial funds provided to persistently low-achieving schools through the 1003(g) funds to support rewards for teachers in low-achieving schools that are successful at improving student outcomes. However, this is not the model favored by district leadership. It is also a model that is opposed by the Jefferson County Teachers Association (Berman).

Expectations and Support

OEA interview data also provide evidence of the strong impact districts can have on the performance of schools.

OEA interview data suggest a central role for district leaders in school improvement. District administrators can send strong messages to school staff about expectations for student learning and can also foster a climate in which staff members feel they have the support needed to meet these expectations.

In connection with this study, OEA conducted interviews with principals and teachers in three schools—all located in a single district—that had progressed from being among the state's lowest-achieving schools in 2000 to among its highest-achieving in 2009. Principals and teachers described dramatic shifts in district and local school board leadership in the last decade. In the past, district staff were rarely present in schools and failed to establish clear expectations or provide support. Interviewees also perceived that district staffing decisions had been unduly influenced by the political preferences of the superintendent and the board. In contrast, interviewees credited the current superintendent and

district staff with establishing clear, high expectations; providing support when needed; monitoring performance at the classroom level; hiring staff based on merit; and building morale. The current superintendent described changes in the local school board from contentious and political to supportive and learning-focused.

OEA has observed systematic differences between districts with higher-performing schools and those with lower-performing schools. Districts with higher-performing schools set and enforce force clear, high expectations; provide school staff with support; and ensure that interactions with their local school boards are focused on student learning.

In data collected for a previous study, OEA identified associations between district leadership practices and school performance. OEA visited three districts in which all schools were performing at a level above what would be predicted by the percentage of the schools' students living in poverty, with the overwhelming majority of district schools performing far above state averages. Two of the districts exceeded state averages for percentages of students living in poverty. OEA also visited six districts with schools that were performing at a level far below what would be predicted by the percentage of the schools' students living in poverty.

Superintendents and district administrators in all three higher-performing districts reported the following practices, not reported in districts with lower-performing schools:

- The district set and monitored expectations for high academic achievement but expected and encouraged administrators and teachers to take the lead in choosing strategies to meet these expectations.
- District administrators engaged directly with schools and specific staff not meeting expectations for school culture, instruction, and student achievement. District staff first provided support to teachers and principals not meeting expectations. Superintendents removed principals who did not meet expectations for maintaining high standards in their buildings.
- The superintendent chose central office staff for their ability to work with teachers and administrators at the school level; most central office staff provided direct formal and informal support to schools, regardless of job title. Many spent the majority of their time in schools rather than in the district office.
- The district invested in long-term strategies such as recruitment and retention of high quality staff. It examined new programs critically and avoided implementing too many new initiatives or initiatives for which evidence of effects was lacking.
- The superintendent's relationship with the local board was focused on student learning; this focus was reflected in use of school board meetings and other interactions.

Lessons Learned From Assistance to Districts Through NCLB

Beginning in 2007, KDE provided intensive and systematic assistance to districts that had not met their AYP goals for 5 consecutive years.

While schools have been the primary focus of state assistance in Kentucky, KDE has long provided technical assistance as needed and by request for districts through positions such as district support facilitators and achievement gap coordinators. Beginning in 2007, KDE provided intensive and systematic assistance to districts that had not met their AYP goals for 5 consecutive years.

Because of the rapidly evolving nature of district assistance and the fact that these forms of assistance have been implemented only recently, it is not possible to determine their effects. However, preliminary data indicate that, similar to school assistance, district assistance appears to have spurred improvements in some districts but had limited impact in others.

Substantial Impact in Some Districts

In some districts, state assistance appears to have spurred improvements in district practices as well as student achievement.

OEA staff analysis of KDE data indicated that, of the 49 districts that received assistance in 2008, 17 met AYP goals in 2009 despite having failed to meet AYP goals in previous years and despite annual increases in reading and mathematics proficiency targets. It is not possible to attribute the success of these districts to the assistance alone; however, OEA interviews with superintendents and assistance team members suggested that the audit and assistance process were catalysts for change in some of these districts.

Some Districts Are Unprepared To Make Suggested Changes

In other districts, assistance appears to have been less welcome and had less impact.

According to KDE staff and to members of district assistance teams, assistance efforts have had limited impact in some districts. Interviewees offered the following explanations for districts' lack of response: discomfort on the part of district leadership or board members in being identified for assistance or in making difficult changes, lack of skilled staff in district leadership positions, and a preference for existing practices and personnel assignments over those that would be required to initiate improvement.

In some districts, resistance is especially strong. In several cases, superintendents did not facilitate communication between the district assistance teams and the school board. In at least one district, board members requested that the district assistance team not present their concerns at a board meeting.

Staff analysis of district leadership assessments conducted by KDE in connection with KRS 160.346 indicated that several previously audited districts appeared to have made little progress implementing suggested improvements to district leadership practices. Many of the issues identified in the 2010 leadership assessments had already been identified in districts' audits within the 5 previous years. Thus, while some districts take immediate advantage of opportunities for assistance, others may require more continuous monitoring and pressure.

Role of Local School Boards in Improving Low-achieving Schools

Superintendents may have difficulty holding principals and teachers accountable for making uncomfortable or unpopular changes in the absence of school board support.

OEA interviews with superintendents, principals, and Voluntary Partnership Assistance Team members also highlighted the critical role that local school boards play in ensuring adequate focus on monitoring, support, and accountability for low-achieving schools. Superintendents interviewed for this study as well as for other OEA studies noted that boards provide the political and, when needed, financial support necessary to address priority needs in low-achieving schools. Board support is especially critical when school improvement requires personnel changes or changes in school practices that may be controversial with local communities. Superintendents may have difficulty holding principals and teachers accountable for making uncomfortable or unpopular changes in the absence of school board support. Similarly, superintendents may be more likely to take more aggressive and systematic steps to monitor, support, and hold school staff accountable when these actions are a priority for school boards.

Districts and local boards can play critical roles in supporting schools' efforts to address deficiencies identified in school audits. However, local school boards may not always be aware of key findings in school audits. Under current practice, school audit teams report results to superintendents in person but rely on superintendents to report audit findings to their boards.[8] School board members are sent copies of school audits but may have difficulty identifying priority needs and next steps among the many findings.

[8]KDE requires that local school board minutes be submitted as evidence that audits were discussed.

Local school board members may also be less prepared to monitor and address academic issues than other aspects of district management, such as finance and contracts. OEA interview data indicated that, in some low-achieving districts, board meetings are more likely to address issues such as athletics, buses, or contracts than they are academic performance.

Local school board members may also be less prepared to monitor and address academic issues than other aspects of district management, such as finance and contracts. In a survey of board members conducted in its 2009 study of leadership training, OEA found that board members feel relatively less prepared to address issues of curriculum and instruction than they do other areas (Commonwealth. Legislative. Office. *Leadership*). Further, local board members may not be sufficiently aware of their responsibilities to monitor schools' academic performance and to engage district leadership in discussions about needed improvements. OEA interview data indicated that, in some low-achieving districts, board meetings are more likely to address issues related to athletics, buses, or contracts than they are academic performance. This may also reflect community priorities expressed during election of board members.

Recommendation 3.4

Recommendation 3.4

The General Assembly should consider amending KRS 160.290 to expand the duties of local school boards to include continuous monitoring of and support for district efforts to improve student learning.

Conclusion
Linking Scholastic Audits, Assistance, and Intervention in the New Accountability System

No single strategy is likely to be effective in assisting all low-achieving schools and districts.

No single assistance strategy is likely to be effective in all low-achieving schools and districts. While existing forms of assistance appear to have been effective in some schools, they have had less impact in schools facing systemic underlying challenges. More can be done to identify and monitor the specific needs of low-achieving schools and districts and to provide relevant assistance.

District and school audits have not included data about many of the specific challenges common to low-achieving schools and districts.

This chapter identifies a number of challenges common to low-achieving schools yet not addressed explicitly in the audits used to monitor districts and schools in the past. These include district and school administrator expectations of and support for high-quality instruction, attraction and retention of qualified staff, and local school board commitment to high academic expectations.

Audits may also serve an important monitoring function for KDE staff and as a means of determining appropriate methods of assistance for individual schools or districts.

In the past, audits have been considered primarily tools for school improvement; however, they may also serve an important monitoring function for KDE staff and as a means of determining appropriate methods of assistance for individual schools or

districts. For example, an audit may indicate whether a school is likely to improve with assistance from District 180 staff or whether alternative strategies, such as recruitment and retention of specially trained district or school leaders, are needed. In cases of continuing low performance, audits might also assist the department in determining the level of consequences that are appropriate for districts and schools.

Recommendation 3.5

Recommendation 3.5

In the redesign of Kentucky's assessment and accountability system, the Kentucky Department of Education, in consultation with relevant groups, should consider modifications to the scholastic audits that have been used in the past to monitor practices in districts and schools. Revised audits should reflect best practices in the areas of leadership, culture, and staffing. Audits should also reflect the important role of school boards, school and district leadership, and school councils in monitoring and supporting improvements in student learning.

Recommendation 3.6

Recommendation 3.6

The Kentucky Department of Education should consider proposing alternative forms of assistance for schools facing systemic underlying challenges such as recruitment of teachers and leaders, student mobility, and lack of community support for changes necessary to meet high academic expectations.

Recommendation 3.7

Recommendation 3.7

The Kentucky Department of Education, in consultation with relevant groups, should consider proposing changes to KRS 160.180 and 704 KAR 3:325 to require joint training for superintendents and local school boards when district audits indicate insufficient monitoring of and insufficient support and accountability for improved student learning in low-achieving schools.

Recommendation 3.8

Recommendation 3.8

In revising the state's assessment and accountability system, the Kentucky Department of Education should consider proposing a system of tiered interventions for districts. This system might include options for districts identified for

assistance followed by required actions for districts that do not address identified deficiencies.

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Appendix A

Consequences for Low-achieving Schools

Schools Affected	Consequences	Statute and/or Regulation
Level 3 Schools	Audit team may recommend evaluation of principal or staff and development of corrective action plan and follow-up evaluation by certified district staff. Commissioner of education may recommend removal of staff for failure to meet requirements of corrective action plan. Audit team may request that the commissioner of education recommend to a local board of education that a school council member be removed.	703 KAR 5:120 Section 4
Level 3 Schools, Two Consecutive Accountability Cycles	Removal of school-based decision making council authority to hire principal. Students have the right to transfer to a school with an accountability index above its assistance line.	KRS 160.345 Section 2(h) 4 703 KAR 5:120
Title I Schools Not Making Adequate Yearly Progress	Consecutive Years Not Making Adequate Yearly Progress: Note: Consequences required for each successive year include consequences for previous years. 2 : Parental notification and student transfer options 3: Offer supplemental educational services 4: District Implement Corrective Action Restructuring Consequences: 5: Write Alternative Governance Plan 6: Implement Alternative Governance NCLB 1116 (b)(8) specifies that one of the following must be included in plans for alternative governance: • reopen school as a charter, • replace all or most school staff, • contract with a private management company to operate the school, • turn the operation of the school over to the state educational agency, or • "any other major restructuring of the school's governance arrangement that makes fundamental reforms."	703 KAR 5:020 Section 11 NCLB 20 U.S.C. 6301 1116 (B)
Persistently Low-achieving Schools	Leadership assessment to determine capacity of principal and school-based decision making council to manage intervention. School implements one of four intervention models: • External Management Option; • Restaffing; • School Closure; or • Transformation	KRS 160.346

Source: Staff summary of statutes, administrative regulations, and federal laws and codes.

Consequences for Low-achieving Districts

Districts Affected	Consequence	Statute and/or Regulation
Districts Not Meeting NCLB Goals	Improvement Status Year 1: Revise District Improvement Plan Year 2: May be subject to corrective action Year 3: Must be subject to corrective action. As required by NCLB, correction action by the KDE must include one of the following: • Defer federal programmatic funds or reduce administrative costs. • Institute a new curriculum. • Replace district personnel. • Remove particular schools from district jurisdiction. • State assumes management of district. • Abolish or restructure district. • Authorize students to transfer from a district school to a higher-performing public school in another district.	703 KAR 5:130 NCLB NCLB 1116(c)(10)(C)
Districts With Level 3 Schools for Two Accountability Cycles	KDE team conducts a district audit. Results of the audit are presented personally by a member of the team to the local school board.	703 KAR 5:130
Districts With Schools Entering Level 3	Modify comprehensive district improvement plan to include specific support plan to assist Level 3 schools.	703 KAR 5:130
Districts With Persistently Low-achieving School	Leadership assessment to determine district capacity to manage intervention. District authority to manage school intervention can be removed as a result of audit.	KRS 160.346
Districts Found by Administrative Hearing to Have a Lack of Efficiency and Effectiveness in Governance	Designation as a "state-assisted district" or a "state-managed district"	KRS 158.785

Source: Staff summary of statutes, administrative regulations, and federal laws and codes.

Appendix B

Federal Requirements for Persistently Low-achieving Schools Receiving School Improvement Grants

In January 2010, the United States Department of Education posted the following final requirements associated with the 1003(g) school improvement grants (*Final*):

Section I (A) 2
(a) Turnaround model: (1) A turnaround model is one in which an LEA must--
(i) Replace the principal and grant the principal sufficient operational flexibility (including in staffing, calendars/time, and budgeting) to implement fully a comprehensive approach in order to substantially improve student achievement outcomes and increase high school graduation rates;
(ii) Using locally adopted competencies to measure the effectiveness of staff who can work within the turnaround environment to meet the needs of students,
(A) Screen all existing staff and rehire no more than 50 percent; and
(B) Select new staff;
(iii) Implement such strategies as financial incentives, increased opportunities for promotion and career growth, and more flexible work conditions that are designed to recruit, place, and retain staff with the skills necessary to meet the needs of the students in the turnaround school;
(iv) Provide staff ongoing, high-quality, job-embedded professional development that is aligned with the school's comprehensive instructional program and designed with school staff to ensure that they are equipped to facilitate effective teaching and learning and have the capacity to successfully implement school reform strategies;
(v) Adopt a new governance structure, which may include, but is not limited to, requiring the school to report to a new "turnaround office" in the LEA or SEA, hire a "turnaround leader" who reports directly to the Superintendent or Chief Academic Officer, or enter into a multi-year contract with the LEA or SEA to obtain added flexibility in exchange for greater accountability;
(vi) Use data to identify and implement an instructional program that is research-based and vertically aligned from one grade to the next as well as aligned with State academic standards;
(vii) Promote the continuous use of student data (such as from formative, interim, and summative assessments) to inform and differentiate instruction in order to meet the academic needs of individual students;
(viii) Establish schedules and implement strategies that provide increased learning time (as defined in this notice); and
(ix) Provide appropriate social-emotional and community-oriented services and supports for students.
(2) A turnaround model may also implement other strategies such as--
(i) Any of the required and permissible activities under the transformation model; or
(ii) A new school model (e.g., themed, dual language academy).
(b) Restart model: A restart model is one in which an LEA converts a school or closes and reopens a school under a charter school operator, a charter management organization (CMO), or an education management organization (EMO) that has been selected through a rigorous review process. (A CMO is a non-profit organization that operates or manages charter schools by centralizing or sharing certain functions and resources among schools. An EMO is a for-profit or non-profit organization that provides "whole-school operation" services to an LEA.) A restart

model must enroll, within the grades it serves, any former student who wishes to attend the school.
(c) School closure: School closure occurs when an LEA closes a school and enrolls the students who attended that school in other schools in the LEA that are higher achieving. These other schools should be within reasonable proximity to the closed school and may include, but are not limited to, charter schools or new schools for which achievement data are not yet available.
(d) Transformation model: A transformation model is one in which an LEA implements each of the following strategies:
(1) Developing and increasing teacher and school leader effectiveness.
(i) Required activities. The LEA must--
(A) Replace the principal who led the school prior to commencement of the transformation model;
(B) Use rigorous, transparent, and equitable evaluation systems for teachers and principals that--
(1) Take into account data on student growth (as defined in this notice) as a significant factor as well as other factors such as multiple observation-based assessments of performance and ongoing collections of professional practice reflective of student achievement and increased high school graduations rates; and
(2) Are designed and developed with teacher and principal involvement;
(C) Identify and reward school leaders, teachers, and other staff who, in implementing this model, have increased student achievement and high school graduation rates and identify and remove those who, after ample opportunities have been provided for them to improve their professional practice, have not done so;
(D) Provide staff ongoing, high-quality, job-embedded professional development (e.g., regarding subject-specific pedagogy, instruction that reflects a deeper understanding of the community served by the school, or differentiated instruction) that is aligned with the school's comprehensive instructional program and designed with school staff to ensure they are equipped to facilitate effective teaching and learning and have the capacity to successfully implement school reform strategies; and
(E) Implement such strategies as financial incentives, increased opportunities for promotion and career growth, and more flexible work conditions that are designed to recruit, place, and retain staff with the skills necessary to meet the needs of the students in a transformation school.
(ii) Permissible activities. An LEA may also implement other strategies to develop teachers' and school leaders' effectiveness, such as--
(A) Providing additional compensation to attract and retain staff with the skills necessary to meet the needs of the students in a transformation school;
(B) Instituting a system for measuring changes in instructional practices resulting from professional development; or
(C) Ensuring that the school is not required to accept a teacher without the mutual consent of the teacher and principal, regardless of the teacher's seniority.
(2) Comprehensive instructional reform strategies.
(i) Required activities. The LEA must--
(A) Use data to identify and implement an instructional program that is research-based and vertically aligned from one grade to the next as well as aligned with State academic standards; and

(B) Promote the continuous use of student data (such as from formative, interim, and summative assessments) to inform and differentiate instruction in order to meet the academic needs of individual students.
(ii) Permissible activities. An LEA may also implement comprehensive instructional reform strategies, such as--
(A) Conducting periodic reviews to ensure that the curriculum is being implemented with fidelity, is having the intended impact on student achievement, and is modified if ineffective;
(B) Implementing a schoolwide "response-to-intervention" model;
(C) Providing additional supports and professional development to teachers and principals in order to implement effective strategies to support students with disabilities in the least restrictive environment and to ensure that limited English proficient students acquire language skills to master academic content;
(D) Using and integrating technology-based supports and interventions as part of the instructional program; and
(E) In secondary schools--
(1) Increasing rigor by offering opportunities for students to enroll in advanced coursework (such as Advanced Placement; International Baccalaureate; or science, technology, engineering, and mathematics courses, especially those that incorporate rigorous and relevant project-, inquiry-, or design-based contextual learning opportunities), early-college high schools, dual enrollment programs, or thematic learning academies that prepare students for college and careers, including by providing appropriate supports designed to ensure that low-achieving students can take advantage of these programs and coursework;
(2) Improving student transition from middle to high school through summer transition programs or freshman academies;
(3) Increasing graduation rates through, for example, credit-recovery programs, re-engagement strategies, smaller learning communities, competency-based instruction and performance-based assessments, and acceleration of basic reading and mathematics skills; or
(4) Establishing early-warning systems to identify students who may be at risk of failing to achieve to high standards or graduate.
(3) Increasing learning time and creating community-oriented schools.
(i) Required activities. The LEA must--
(A) Establish schedules and strategies that provide increased learning time (as defined in this notice); and
(B) Provide ongoing mechanisms for family and community engagement.
(ii) Permissible activities. An LEA may also implement other strategies that extend learning time and create community-oriented schools, such as--
(A) Partnering with parents and parent organizations, faith- and community-based organizations, health clinics, other State or local agencies, and others to create safe school environments that meet students' social, emotional, and health needs;
(B) Extending or restructuring the school day so as to add time for such strategies as advisory periods that build relationships between students, faculty, and other school staff;
(C) Implementing approaches to improve school climate and discipline, such as implementing a system of positive behavioral supports or taking steps to eliminate bullying and student harassment; or
(D) Expanding the school program to offer full-day kindergarten or pre-kindergarten.
(4) Providing operational flexibility and sustained support.

(i) Required activities. The LEA must--
(A) Give the school sufficient operational flexibility (such as staffing, calendars/time, and budgeting) to implement fully a comprehensive approach to substantially improve student achievement outcomes and increase high school graduation rates; and
(B) Ensure that the school receives ongoing, intensive technical assistance and related support from the LEA, the SEA, or a designated external lead partner organization (such as a school turnaround organization or an EMO).
(ii) Permissible activities. The LEA may also implement other strategies for providing operational flexibility and intensive support, such as--
(A) Allowing the school to be run under a new governance arrangement, such as a turnaround division within the LEA or SEA; or
(B) Implementing a per-pupil school-based budget formula that is weighted based on student needs.
Student growth means the change in achievement for an individual student between two or more points in time. For grades in which the State administers summative assessments in reading/language arts and mathematics, student growth data must be based on a student's score on the State's assessment under section 1111(b)(3) of the ESEA. A State may also include other measures that are rigorous and comparable across classrooms.

Appendix C

National Assessment of Educational Progress
Trial Urban District Assessment Results for
Jefferson County, Large Cities, and Nation
2009 Effects of Commonwealth School Improvement Fund Grants and Title I School

	Reading						Math					
Grade	**4**			**8**			**4**			**8**		
	All	Black	FRL**	All	Black	FRL	All	Black	FRL	All	Black	FRL
JCPS	219	203	208	259	245	248	233	216	221	271	252	257
Large City*	210	201	202	252	243	244	231	219	225	271	256	262
Nation	220	204	206	262	245	249	239	222	228	282	260	266

*Large city: territory inside an urbanized area and inside a principal city with population of 250,000 or more. NAEP uses large city (formerly referred to as large central city) as a comparison group for the Trial Urban District Assessment. In order to make comparisons between the trial urban district assessment and large cities, the NAEP large city jurisdiction also includes those portions of the participating urban districts which fall outside of the city limits. Large city is not synonymous with the term "inner city."
**Students eligible for free or reduced-price lunch.
Source. US. Department. Institute.

Appendix D

Staffing and Student Assignment Data
Jefferson County Persistently Low-achieving Schools
2010

School	Percentage, Teacher Retention	Percentage of Teachers With 0-3 years Experience	Percentage of Students in Magnet Options or Open Enrollment**
Shawnee High	67%	23%	4%
Western Middle	77	50	0
Frost Middle	73	60	0
Western High	87	27	11
Valley High	76	40	0
Fern Creek High	85	15	15
Jefferson All Schools	N/A	23	N/A
Jefferson Middle Schools	88	N/A	38
Jefferson High Schools	91	N/A	32

*Data show percentage of teachers retained at each school from the 2009 to 2010 school years.
**Each of these options allow students to enroll in schools that are outside of their neighborhood school.
Source: Teacher retention data from Jefferson County Public Schools. Percentage of teachers with 0-3 years experience from staff analysis of data from the Kentucky Department of Education.

Appendix E

Impact of Highly Skilled Educators on Reading and Mathematics Performance of Lowest-achieving Schools

	2002	2003	2004	Gain 2002-2004
		Elementary		
HSE (n=12)	25.7%	33.5%	45.0%	19.3%
No HSE (n=40)	28.8	35.4	42.6	13.8
		Middle		
HSE (n=3)	27.2	32.5	40.6	13.4
No HSE (n=19)	25.5	31.3	33.0	7.5
		High		
HSE (n=5)	12.7	18.4	19.7	7.0
No HSE (n=15)	13.2	18.9	20.6	7.4

Notes: This analysis includes only those schools that were in the lowest 10 percent of schools in 2002 as measured by the percentage of students proficient or distinguished in reading and math combined. The table compares performance of schools that received assistance from HSEs in 2003 and 2004 and those that received no HSE assistance.
Source: Staff analysis of data from the Kentucky Department of Education.

Appendix F

Results of Leadership Assessments
Persistently Low-achieving Schools, 2009

Table F.1 shows the results of the leadership assessments conducted by the Kentucky Department of Education for each school identified as persistently low achieving in 2009. As required by KRS 160.346, these assessments determine whether a school-based decision making council retains its authority and makes a recommendation about the intervention model to be chosen for the school and whether the school's principal has the capacity to lead the intervention. The leadership assessment also determines whether the district has the capacity to manage the intervention chosen for the school. The table also shows the intervention option chosen by the district for the school.[1]

School	District	Leadership Assessment Recommendation				Option Chosen	
		District Has Capacity	Council Retains Authority	Principal Has Capacity	Intervention Model	Principal Retained	Intervention Model
Western High	Jefferson County	Yes	No	Yes	Restaffing	Yes	Restaffing
Western Middle	Jefferson County	Yes	No	No	Transformation	No	Restaffing
Valley High	Jefferson County	Yes	No	No	Restaffing	Yes	Restaffing
Shawnee High	Jefferson County	Yes	No	Yes	Restaffing	Yes	Restaffing
Fern Creek High	Jefferson County	Yes	No	No	Restaffing	Yes	Restaffing
Frost Middle	Jefferson County	Yes	No	No	Restaffing	No	Restaffing
Caverna High	Caverna Ind.	Yes	Yes	Yes	Transformation	No	Transformation
Lawrence High	Lawrence County	Yes	No	No	Transformation	No	Transformation
Leslie High	Leslie County	No	Yes	Yes	Restaffing	Yes	Transformation
Metcalfe High	Metcalfe County	Yes	No	No	Transformation	No	Transformation

Source: Staff compilation of data from the Kentucky Department of Education.

[1]In the case of Leslie County, this option was chosen by the Commissioner of Education and the school-based decision-making council.